Epistemic Nostalgia

Bouma, J.M.J.

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List of Abbreviations

AAÜG	Gesetz zur Überleitung der Ansprüche und Anwartschaften aus Zusatz- und Sonderversorgungssystemen der DDR [Law on the Transfer of Claims and Entitlements for Additional and Special Retirement Schemes of the GDR]
ABF	Arbeiter- und Bauernfakultät [Workers and Peasants' Faculty]
AEK	Alternative Enquête Kommission Deutsche Zeitgeschichte [Alternative Commission of Inquiry into German Contemporary History]
AG	Arbeitsgruppe [working group]
AK	Arbeitskreis [working group]
AKGKS	Antifaschistisches Komitee gegen Krieg und Sozialraub [Antifascist Committee against War and Social Theft]
ALV	Arbeitslosenverband Deutschland [German Association of the Unemployed]
BAG	Berliner Alternatives Geschichtsforum [Berlin Alternative History Forum]
BDM	Bund Deutscher Mädel
BSG	Oberstes Bundessozialgericht [Supreme Social Court]
BStU	Bundesbeauftragter für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik [Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the Former German Democratic Republic]
BüSGLH	Bündnis für soziale Gerechtigkeit Berlin- Lichtenberg/ Hohenschönhausen [Alliance for Social Justice Berlin-Lichtenberg/Hohenschönhausen]
BüSGM	Bündnis für soziale Gerechtigkeit und Menschenwürde [Alliance for Social Justice and Human Dignity]
BVfS	Berliner Verfassungsschutz [Berlin's security agency]
B'90-Grüne	Bündnis '90/Die Grünen [Alliance '90/The Greens]
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union [Christian Democratic Union]
DDR	Deutsche Demokratische Republik [German Democratic Republic]
DF	Deutscher Friedensrat [German Peace Council]
DFB	Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands [Democratic Women's Federation of Germany]
DGB	Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund [German Trade Union Federation]
DKP	Deutsche Kommunistische Partei [German Communist Party]
Einigungs-vertrag	Vertrag zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik über die Herstellung der Einheit Deutschlands [Treaty on the Establishment of German Unity]
EPF	European Peace Forum
FDGB	Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund [Free German Trade Union]
FDJ	Freie Deutsche Jugend [Free German Youth]
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei [Free Democratic Party]
FETG	Freundeskreis "Ernst-Thälmann-Gedenkstätte Ziegenhals" [Circle of Friends of the Ernst Thälmann Memorial in Ziegenhals]
FPdR	Freundeskreis Palast der Republik [Circle of Friends of the Palast der Republik]
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
FSS	Freundeskreis der Sport-Senioren [Friends' Circle of Sport-Seniors]
GBM	Gesellschaft zum Schutz von Bürgerrecht und Menschenwürde [Society for the Protection of Citizen's Rights and Human Dignity]
GDR	German Democratic Republic

GRH	Gesellschaft zur rechtlichen und humanitären Unterstützung [Society for Legal and Humanitarian Support]
GST	Gesellschaft für Sport und Technik [Society for Sport and Technology]
HIAG	Hilfsgemeinschaft auf Gegenseitigkeit der Angehörigen der ehemaligen Waffen-SS [Mutual Help Community of Members of the Former Waffen-SS]
HSH	Berlin-Hohenschönhausen
HU	Humboldt University
HV-A	Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung des MfS [Main Directorate for Reconnaisance of the MfS; the foreign intelligence service of the MfS]
IM	Informelle Mitarbeiter ["Unofficial Employees"; informants of the Stasi]
Insider-komitee	Insiderkomitee zur Förderung der kritischen Aneignung der Geschichte des MfS [Insider Committee for the Promotion of Critical Appropriation of the History of the MfS]
IROKK	Initiativgruppe zur Rehabilitierung der Opfer des Kalten Krieges [Initiative Group for the Rehabilitation of Victims of the Cold War]
ISOR	Initiativgemeinschaft zum Schutz der sozialen Rechte ehemaliger Angehöriger bewaffneter Organe und der Zollverwaltung der DDR [Joint Initiative for the Protection of the Social Rights of Former Members of the Armed Bodies and the Customs Administration of the GDR]
IV VdN	Interessenverband ehemaliger Teilnehmer am antifaschistischen Widerstand, Verfolgter des Naziregimes und Hinterbliebener [Association of Former Participants in the Antifascist Resistance, Persons Persecuted by the Nazi-regime and Their Family Members]
JW	Junge Welt
KdAW	Komitee der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer in der DDR
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands [Communist Party of Germany]
KSČM	Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy [Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia]
LAG BW-Dora	Lagerarbeitsgemeinschaft Buchenwald-Dora [Camp work group Buchenwald-Dora]
MfS	Ministerium für Staatssicherheit; Stasi [Ministry of State Security]
MLPD	Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands [Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany]
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
ND	Neues Deutschland
NVA	Nationale Volksarmee [National People's Army]
OiBE	Offizier im Besonderen Einsatz [Special Operations Officer of the MfS]
OKV	Ostdeutsches Kuratorium von Verbänden [East German Board of Associations]
PDS	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus [Party of Democratic Socialism]
PoW	Prisoner of War
RFB	Revolutionärer Freundschaftsbund Ernst Thälmann und Kameraden [Revolutionary Frienship Circle Ernst Thälmann and Comrades]; Rote Frontkämpferbund [Alliance of Red Front-Fighters]
RÜG	Rentenüberleitungsgesetz [Pension Transfer Act]
SAT-K	Sozialer Arbeitskreis Treptow-Köpenick [Social Work Group of Treptow-Köpenick]
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands [Socialist Unity Party of Germany]
SMAD	Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland [Soviet Military Administration in Germany]

SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands [Social Democratic Party of Germany]
TIG	Territoriale Initiativgruppe [Territorial Initiative Groups]
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UOKG	Union der Opferverbände kommunistischer Gewaltherrschaft [Union of Associations of Victims of Communist Tyranny]
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
ver.di	Vereinigte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft [United Services Union]
VFDG	Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaften Förderverein zur Geschichte der Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbewegung [Free German Trade Unions Foundation to Support the History of the German Trade Union Movement]
VKSG	Verband der Kleingärtner, Siedler und Grundstücksnutzer [Association of Allotment Gardeners, Settlers and Plot Users]
VPT	Verband zur Pflege der Traditionen der Nationalen Volksarmee und der Grenztruppen der DDR [Association for the Maintenance of the Traditions of the National People's Army and the Border Troops of the GDR]
VVN-BdA	Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes - Bund der Antifaschistinnen und Antifaschisten [Association of Persons Persecuted by the Nazi Regime - Union of Antifascists]

Introduction

Getting access

On a bright June day in 2012, I headed to the *Neues Deutschland* building in East Berlin. My aim was to have a conversation with former Stasi members and sympathizers about their personal biographies and the way in which they understand the GDR and unified Germany. I was interested in the historiography of post-socialism, and wanted to learn more about the way in which the "losers" of the *Wende* reflected on their lives in the GDR, a state they had believed in, after its demise. During my initial quest for information, I soon found out that a group of former GDR cadres had united in a number of organizations, under the umbrella of an "East German Board of Associations" (*Ostdeutsches Kuratorium von Verbänden*, OKV). Quite unspectacularly, I had found their contact information on the internet, where they host regularly updated websites. Two of the organizations had immediately responded to my request for a meeting, and so it was that I trailed to Berlin to see their representatives.

In the course of the encounter, it turned out that my curiosity was met by theirs. A first meeting with two representatives of the OKV's general board (a former professor and a former Stasi officer) quickly turned into an interview apparently designed to assess my motives – most importantly, if I was not intending to publish a scandalous article in the popular press. At the time, I was rather bemused by the string of questions pertaining to my family background – most noticeably including the occupations of my parents and grandparents. Only later did I learn that this was standard Stasi investigation practice.[1] I reported that I was interested not primarily in German issues but in the history and historiography of the former socialist states (at that time I had just finished a project on history and epics in post-Soviet Turkmenistan),[2] and that I was born in the Netherlands three years before the Berlin Wall came down. My parents and grandparents were all Dutch, and, as a bonus, had started their careers as workers and farmers – which appealed to them since the GDR was, ultimately, conceived of as the "workers' and peasants' state" (*Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat*). It was, however, my mother's occupational background in children's day care which made the most favorable impression on my interviewees; they asked me detailed questions about Dutch day care arrangements, which they contrasted with what they saw as

[1] I would like to thank Neringa Klumbyte for pointing this out to me.
[2] Amieke Bouma, "Turkmenistan: Epics in Place of Historiography". In: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, special issue "Nationen und Geschichtspolitik im Kaukasus und in Zentralasien" , 59/4 (2011), pp. 559- 585.

the limited access to day care in East Germany after the fall of the GDR. This neatly fitted into their paradigm that the GDR provided better social care than does the FRG.

Eventually the OKV Board, and in particular the organization's then-president Siegfried Mechler, gave me the green light, and kindly introduced me to several activists from various associations affiliated to the OKV. I understood that the OKV's organizational culture was rather hierarchical, and this obviously worked to my benefit.

The OKV has been serving as an umbrella for various legal and social support action groups. The biggest OKV member organizations in terms of membership are the *Gesellschaft zum Schutz von Bürgerrecht und Menschenwürde* (GBM), the *Gesellschaft zur rechtlichen und humanitären Unterstützung* (GRH) and the *Initiativgemeinschaft zum Schutz der sozialen Rechte ehemaliger Angehöriger bewaffneter Organe und der Zollverwaltung der DDR* (ISOR). Most members of these organizations, and especially of ISOR and the GRH, had a professional background in the "Stasi" secret service (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*, MfS), army (NVA), or juridical apparatus of the former GDR; in short, they were united in having a profile that after unification made them subject to political and juridical measures of transitional justice. But I also encountered OKV members and sympathizers who had not been involved in the GDR power ministries, but who can still be described as having had positions close to the regime, including numerous professors, foreign traders and cultural workers. While ISOR and other lobby and support groups have certain pragmatic goals (like the elimination of pension reductions), smaller OKV member associations are centred around socialist heritage conservation, and protest against the destruction of GDR buildings and monuments that have tremendous symbolic value to them. Such groups include the *Freundeskreis "Ernst-Thälmann-Gedenkstätte Ziegenhals" e.V.* and the *Freundeskreis Palast der Republik*. The latter lobbied for the preservation of East Berlin's "People's Palace", the political and cultural centre of the GDR. Since the demolition of this building the *Freundeskreis* maintains mobile exhibitions on the *Palast*, both out of a personal connection to the torn-down center and in order to inform people about "the real history of the GDR". What all these associations have in common is that they want to change the public perception of the GDR, and the Stasi in particular.[3] To this end the *Ostdeutsches Kuratorium von*

[3] This was mentioned by several people whom I spoke with in Berlin, including Siegfried Mechler, Helmut Holfert and Wolfgang Schmidt, who was previously the chair of the now-defunct *Insiderkomitee zur Förderung der kritischen Aneignung der Geschichte des MfS*, a workgroup within the GBM which focussed in particular on historiography. Interviews conducted in Berlin (with Wolfgang Schmidt, 12 June 2012; with Helmut Holfert, 10 July 2012; and with Siegfried Mechler, 12 July 2012).

Verbänden (OKV) also organizes historical conferences and publishes books on the GDR's history.

Over the course of four years, I conducted six fieldwork trips to Berlin and interviewed 30 activists and members of twelve OKV organizations.[4] These meetings usually comprised life interviews, focusing on memories and events both during and after the GDR, and ended with more detailed accounts of their views on history and current politics, and of their social and political activities. Most of these interviews lasted two and a half to four hours. Some people, in particular board members of various OKV organizations, were interviewed repeatedly about the developments in their respective organizations. I also attended several meetings and events that were organized by different OKV organizations, as well as the OKV's 2013 Board Meeting, and talked with OKV members and sympathizers on these occasions.[5]

During these interviews and conversations my own role was that of stimulating my interlocutors to tell their stories. I guided the conversation by posing questions, and naturally expressed empathy whenever I sincerely felt it – especially in the context of memories of war and suffering. My interlocutors were aware of the fact that the goal of my research was not a vindication of the GDR. Rather, I made it clear that I am interested in biographies and personal views on history and politics, how they formed and developed. However, I am also aware that most of my respondents in fact did hope to convince me of their views on the GDR. At the same time, to have an outsider simply listening to their stories, and take them seriously, was to some already a vindication of these stories.

My fieldwork was also facilitated by the advanced age of most OKV members (new members are almost absent), which made it easier for them to talk to me – and some of the elder members also regarded my presence as a "last opportunity" to tell their story. Obviously, there were also people who did not want to speak with me – either out of suspicion, or, in some cases, because they regarded talking about their past "too painful".[6] Yet after I returned to Berlin for the third time, thereby having, in the eyes of the OKV, proven my serious research intentions, I found that several of my first interview partners had

[4] Here, I am counting the organizations that the interviewed primarily identified with – very often, they were simultaneously members in other OKV organizations, yet with a lower degree of engagement.
[5] Throughout this dissertation, I refer to people interviewed with their real names in case their activities within the OKV were public. Where this was not the case, I have made use of pseudonyms.
[6] An initial plan to meet with a former director of one of the GDR's antifascist memorials was cancelled for this reason. Two interviewees reported that they had friends with interesting stories, but who did not want to talk to an outsider.

recommended me to friends, and people approached me asking whether I would like to also hear their life stories, or they suggested who else I might want to meet.

Other important sources for my research on the OKV included the many publications written by its different organizations, as well as by individual members. Organizational newsletters, usually sent out on a monthly or quarterly basis, provided valuable information on the developments within the OKV and its subsidiaries. Newsletters of earlier years were used to trace back events and debates in the past. The websites also provide organizational information, including agendas, reports of past events, protest letters and calls for action, and often also correspondences with political parties or functionaries, as well as a space for discussion amongst members. The OKV's views on politics and history are moreover documented in books published by the organizations (especially the bigger ones such as ISOR, GRH and GBM) as well as by specific activists within the OKV (often former professors or ambassadors). Together these can be regarded as the "internal" sources on the OKV. A variety of "external" sources on the OKV were also used, including newspaper reports, books criticizing the OKV's activities, and even a report by the Berlin state security on several of the OKV's largest organizations. For my research on the judicial activities of the OKV, I looked into the German pension laws and traced back the official documentation of court procedures related to ISOR's legal complaints, especially the court rulings. Such sources helped to corroborate the claims made by representatives of the OKV on their activities and achievements.

As I learned more about the different organizations represented in the OKV and the outlooks of their members, I understood that this would not simply be a project about a group that was embittered by a failed adjustment to life in unified Germany. I was surprised to find that most of the people I spoke to used their bitterness for a kind of "productive anger"; the OKV gave them the opportunity to engage with a broad scope of political, juridical and social problems. Ironically, the OKV was their pathway out of isolation and arguably contributes to their integration into post-*Wende* German society – while at the same time maintaining, shaping and channeling their emotional attachment to the GDR. On a practical level, many people appeared to use the OKV as a means to stay "occupied" – quite literally, after having lost their jobs during the *Wende* or soon thereafter. Furthermore, their professed mourning over the GDR did not prevent many of them from being actively involved in other organizations that have nothing to do with the former socialist state. This dawned on me when during my first research trip to Berlin, two ladies told me that "this country [unified Germany]

is not our country" – only to immediately tell me about their many volunteering activities, not only for the OKV but also for several local and social initiatives.[7] This seeming paradox struck me, and ignited my curiosity about the way in which a specific memorialization of the past enables present-oriented activities.

What also struck me was the way in which other researchers approach this organization. As former Stasi members and their sympathizers have a reputation of being closed to outsiders, I was initially mainly worried that representatives of the OKV would be unwilling to talk with me. Some friends and colleagues even warned me that I was going to meet very dangerous persons, suggesting that the former agents of the GDR's secret service were secretly still in operation. Indeed, researchers who had previously worked on GDR secret police and military had found it difficult to contact former officers. To quote from Andrew Bickford, who conducted field research on former officers of the GDR's army (*Nationale Volksarmee*) in the late 1990s, "[w]hile it was generally not a problem meeting with lower-ranking officers and their families, gaining access to high-ranking former officers was a tricky process of vetting, knowing who to talk to, observing military courtesies and customs, of using the right words and phrases at the right time".[8] His prize interviewee, former NVA general Klaus Dieter Baumgarten, was willing to meet with the anthropologist only after a full year of attempts to establish contacts. He then asked Bickford to come to a train station wearing that day's copy of *Neues Deutschland*, picked him up with his GDR *Trabant* car and drove to his own house, taking various intentional detours ostensibly to prevent Bickford from locating its exact position. Anna Funder, in her *Stasiland*, mentions the same kind of trouble in speaking to former Stasi officers in the early 1990s – and even reports that people who were willing to talk to her received death threats.[9]

Yet when Funder and Bickford did their research, in the 1990s, the fall of the GDR was obviously still much fresher on people's minds. Already in the late 1990s Bickford observed that "[a]fter assuaging their initial suspicions, former officers were more than willing to speak to me"; his position as a foreigner and as a scholar made him appear more "objective" in the eyes of his informants.[10] By the time I arrived in Berlin, ten more years had passed, and all people I spoke with seemed to have reconciled themselves with their status of

[7] Interview with Margitta Mechler and Gertrud Fischer, 13 June 2012.
[8] Andrew Bickford, *Fallen Elites: The Military Other in Post-Unification* Germany (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2011), p. xiii.
[9] Anna Funder, *Stasiland: Stories from behind the Berlin Wall* (London: Granta Books 2011; first edition 2003), p. 243.
[10] Andrew Bickford, *Fallen Elites*, p. 17.

belonging to a "fallen elite", to use Bickford's term. Yet this was not resignation, for they still persist in their public activities to rehabilitate the GDR heritage.

It is also important that the former GDR cadres I spoke with were, with very few exceptions, between 70 and 90 years old. Over the past 25 years, they became used to being asked for interviews. They say they have turned down most of these, out of disappointment with the way they are generally depicted in the press.[11] But instead of operating secretly, these organizations have become focused on improving the "public reputation" of the GDR – and, by extension, of their members. To this end, OKV organizations produce a constant stream of pamphlets and volumes, and regularly write letters to the editors of "friendly newspapers". They also developed a strong internet presence to bolster their image. This does not mean that they are necessarily open, or honest; rather, they have a particular vision on historical and current developments which they try to "sell". I am aware that they decided to talk to me in the hope that I would convey their views to a larger audience. They seem to have accepted that I do this from a particular research perspective which will not necessarily be flattering.[12]

Interestingly, especially colleagues working on German history expressed moral qualms about my research plan. When it comes to the GDR, the scholar is still pressured to clarify his or her stance on politics and morality. Twenty-five years after the end of the GDR, this is obviously not just an academic question: when in 2014 the *Linke* party (which grew out of the successor party to the GDR's Socialist Unity Party) was for the first time about to not just participate but *lead* a new government in the German federal state of Thuringia, the media debate about this process revived discussions about the party's SED heritage, in framings reminiscent of the early 1990s.[13]

Following Thomas Kohut, my point here is that one does not have to sympathize with people in order to empathize with them. When interviewing people who belong to the "German Generation" born between 1900-1914, Kohut found that they recollected their Nazi sympathies without much personal reflection. Kohut explained his own position in the

[11] Interviews with Helmut Holfert (OKV press officer; 10 July 2012); Wolfgang Schmidt (acting director ISOR; 12 June 2012).

[12] In 2014, I published the first results of my research in an article on the ISOR. In an e-mail, ISOR representatives wrote that they recognized their organization in the article, even if they disagreed with my interpretation of specific issues. When I visited Berlin in May 2015, this position was reiterated by other OKV members.

[13] My intention is not to equate the *Linke* with the members and positions of the OKV; to the contrary, chapter 5 will demonstrate how remote they are from each other. See also Amieke Bouma, "Ideological Confirmation and Party Consolidation: Germany's Die Linke and the Financial and Refugee Crises". In: Luke March and Dan Keith (eds.), *Europe's Radical Left. From Marginality to the Mainstream?* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International 2016), pp. 133-154.

following manner: "[m]y aim, then, is certainly not to engender sympathy for the interviewees, or for Germans belonging to their generation, but to reduce the intellectual and emotional distance separating us from then, in part by thinking our way inside their unique historical circumstances, in part by recognizing that on some level they were as we are and that we have within us the capacity to be as they were."[14] And this opens up the possibility to look at the people under investigation not only in their capacity as perpetrators or bystanders of particular politically motivated crimes, but also in their capacity as people who had to get on with life after the collapse of the system that encapsulated their values and beliefs.

Research questions

So most broadly, the question is how the change of political order affects people who strongly identified with the former state, and how they reflect on their former lives some 25 years after the event. How are their emotional attachment to the former state, and their negative attitude to the new situation, affected by moral and political debates, as well as by the juridical and practical outcomes of regime change?

Such questions help us to understand more of what the collapse of a political system, and even an entire state, does to the people who belonged to this state, and who continue to embody the old state in the new one – both out of personal attachment and because they are assigned this role by others.

This thesis is therefore chiefly about memory, and the GDR genealogy of that contemporary memorization. This memorization can come in very different forms: celebrating GDR state holidays, writing autobiographies, even conducting lawsuits and political lobbying. In Germany, questions of GDR memory that I am interested in are often understood as falling into the category of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the "coming to terms with the past". As this term was coined in the context of how to remember and overcome the heritage of Nazi atrocities, any engagement with the GDR heritage is therefore implicitly or explicitly linked to the heritage of the Third Reich. Such comparisons – which I believe are very misleading – will come up at several points of the present thesis, all the more since several of my interview partners had themselves been enrolled in the *Hitler Jugend* in their youth.

[14] Thomas Kohut, *A German Generation: An Experiential History of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 17.

But the present study is also about civil society activism, in a very peculiar case. How do former GDR elites organize themselves, how do these organizations maintain GDR practices and values? Which priorities do they set for themselves in activism (social support, defending the GDR heritage, political activity), and which strategies do they select for which purposes (legal procedures, lobbying politicians, public campaigns and manifestations)? How far do they continue the strategies that they have been familiar with from their GDR past, and in how far do they adapt them to the new legal and political framework of unified Germany? And finally, how do OKV organizations – which, following their political loyalties and self-definition, I will characterize as being part of the radical leftist spectrum in Germany – interact with other left and radical left organizations, including the *Linke* party but also extra-parliamentary parties and groups? How successful is their linkage and their outreach?

During my research, it soon transpired that what is central to both the memory and the political and social activism of the OKV members is their understanding of German politics, both before 1989 and after. Another important set of questions for my research therefore focused on the way in which OKV members understand politics, and how they form and maintain this understanding.

Remembering the GDR

From my opening remarks it should be clear that any analysis of the OKV – whether from the perspective of contemporary history, memory studies, or politics – must take into consideration the highly politicized nature of German debates on the GDR heritage. While the history of the GDR is still very present, and many citizens have experienced life before 1989, public discourse is largely dominated by discussions over the political structure of the GDR, epitomized by its system of political repression through the secret service (Stasi). Yet the GDR also "lives on" in the minds of even young people in so far as many in the eastern parts of unified Germany still perceive themselves as different from their western counterparts. Easterners claim they are being neglected and regarded as somehow inferior by a "West" that "overtook" the East after 1990 – regardless of the fact that today, in 2016, both the president and the prime minister of unified Germany have East German roots. Some investigative journalists have tried to prove that the Stasi enjoys "a second life", and undermines German

state and society.[15] Civil society organizations that represent their interests – whether legitimate or not – are regarded by many as enemies of the state.

Official post-'89 narratives on the GDR thus indeed reflect the prevalence of western German voices in politics, but also in science, business and the media. In mainstream discourses this has led to the "objectification" of the GDR as a static and backward state.

Post-*Wende* debates about the character of the GDR have been shaped by two commissions of inquiry into the GDR that worked from 1992-1994 and from 1995-1998, respectively. Both commissions came into being on the initiative of the German parliament, the Bundestag.[16] On the symbolic date of 17 June 1994,[17] an overwhelming majority of the Bundestag deputies supported the official proclamation that the GDR was an "SED dictatorship".[18] This was a seemingly definite verdict on how the history of the GDR should be assessed, on the basis of an inquiry commission of historians whose mandate was clearly political. From the start its work was marred by ideological disagreements between parliamentarians: while conservatives and liberals insisted on viewing the bankruptcy of the GDR as proof of the inhumanity inherent in any form of socialist ideology, left-leaning parties wanted to see the political wrongs of the GDR evaluated in isolation from its proclaimed ideology.[19]

The Parliament's attempt to formulate, and then to disseminate, an established "correct" view on recent history has evoked much criticism, as an attempt to monopolize historical interpretation. Yet this critique might be unjust; as Andrew H. Beattie argues, the first commission's attempt at "transitional justice" – to hold to account those who had been

[15] Jürgen Schreiber, *Die Stasi lebt: Berichte aus einem unterwanderten Land* (München: Droemer Knaur Verlag, 2009). The phrase "the Stasi is alive" is often used, also in more nuanced reports; see e.g. Christoph Seils, "Das Stasi Netzwerk Lebt". In: *Cicero* (June 2006). Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.seils.in-berlin.de/innenpolitik/das-stasi-netzwerk-lebt.html

[16] The full names of these two commissions of inquiry were "*Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland*" (Coming to Terms with the History and Consequences of the SED Dictatorship in Germany), which ran from 1992 to 1994, and "*Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozess der deutschen Einheit*" (Overcoming the Consequences of the SED Dictatorship in the Process of German Unity); from 1995 to 1998.

[17] On 17 June 1953, a large workers′ uprising took place in the GDR which was brutally suppressed by the authorities.

[18] For more on the first Enquete-Kommission that prepared the ground for this motion, see the article by the chair of the Bundestag committee: Rainer Eppelmann, "Die Enquete-Kommissionen zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur". In: Eppelmann et al (eds.), *Bilanz und Perspektiven der DDR-Forschung* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh 2003), pp. 401-406.

[19] For a more thorough discussion, see Andrew H. Beattie, *Playing Politics with History: The Bundestag Inquiries into East Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books 2008).

responsible for repression in the GDR – was supported by a large majority of East Germans.[20] The initiators of this first commission came from the Social Democratic Party (SPD), and they saw it as "a forum for an ongoing, broad and systematic debate about the GDR and its meaning in unified Germany."[21] The commission would "systematically examine the workings of the old regime (and thus counteract public hysteria over the Stasi connections of prominent individuals)" and "recommend legislative reforms, especially to benefit the SED's victims."[22] The commissions were thus "less 'top-down' and more consultative and inclusive than is often assumed."[23] Still, proportional representation hardly invalidates claims that this was mainly a West German enterprise;[24] and Beattie also showed that conservative and center-right parties (CDU, FDP) have used the East German past to invalidate their opponents on the left (including not only the SED successor party PDS, but also the SPD and even the B'90-Greens – a party that absorbed a considerable proportion of the GDR's civil rights movement).[25]

Yet the Bundestag did not feel completely comfortable taking on a leading role in memorialization either, and from the late 1990s we observe a "move from official to state-mandated memory".[26] The Bundestag remained important in allocating funds to memorials and other projects of commemoration but it did so mainly through third parties and after expert review. Of special interest to us is the Sabrow Commission (named after its chairman Martin Sabrow, a leading historian of contemporary Germany), which worked in 2005 and 2006. In contradistinction to the previous commissions, the Sabrow Commission did not comprise politicians but historians and specialists in the field of GDR memory and memorialization; and its goal was not to investigate GDR history but to review how GDR history has been studied and interpreted since 1990. One of its main findings was that up until that point the memory of the GDR in unified Germany had been too much focused on

[20] Andrew H. Beattie, "The Politics of Remembering the GDR: Official and State-Mandated Memory since 1990". In: David Clarke and Ute Wölfel (eds.), *Remembering the German Democratic Republic in a United Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2011), pp. 23-34; here p. 25.
[21] Beattie, "The Politics of Remembering the GDR", p. 26.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., p. 27.
[24] This is so because the population of the GDR was much smaller than that of West Germany. On 31 October 1990, the FRG comprised of 63,6 million inhabitants, whereas the GDR's population comprised of only 16,1 million. Table adopted from the UN World Populations Prospects 1990, New York 1991 in Jean-Louis Rallu and Allain Blum (eds.), *European Population. Vol. I: Country Analysis: Demographie Europeene* (Paris: John Libby Eurotext 1991), p. 102.
[25] Individual B'90/Grünen politicians differed in their position on the Enquete Kommission; whereas some were skeptical of its self-acclaimed role in history writing, others viewed the commission as a chance to encourage (also) history writing "from below". See Beattie, *Playing Politics with History*, p.45-46.
[26] Beattie, "The Politics of Remembering the GDR", p. 33.

political and institutional aspects – and therefore failed to connect to the "everyday memories" (*Alltag*) of ordinary east German citizens.[27]

Three types of memory

Sabrow later identified three ways in which the GDR is remembered: (1) as a dictatorship (*Diktaturgedächtnis*); (2) through the ways in which people accommodated themselves to the regime (*Arrangementsgedächtnis*); and (3) as a legitimate attempt at radical social change (*Fortschrittsgedächnis*).[28] This is a useful distinction for contextualizing the sort of memory current amongst activists and sympathizers of the OKV.

Broadly speaking, the *Diktaturgedächtnis* (memory of dictatorship; more commonly referred to in English as the "totalitarianism thesis") is the most politically salient, and thus most prominent in "official memory". This is visible in politics, public debates, documentaries, remembrance day activities and education. Naturally, this memory is also preserved through the network of former Stasi prison memorials. The director of the memorial at the Stasi investigative prison in *Berlin-Hohenschönhausen* (HSH), Hubertus Knabe, is a very vocal proponent of this *Diktaturgedächtnis*. Knabe regularly publishes scathing indictments of current politics for not bringing the perpetrators to justice.[29] In turn, the HSH memorial, as well as Knabe, have regularly been protested by former Stasi officers, in concerted activities supported by OKV organizations. Moreover, the *Diktaturgedächtnis* has strong backing in academia, with well-known political scientists such as Klaus Schroeder and Eckard Jesse.[30]

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[27] The Sabrow Commission published a collective volume to "document the debates" in and *on* the commission (as it was heavily criticized for its wish to focus more on *Alltag* – interpreted by several conservative politicians, historians and commentators as a "left" political agenda). The volume offers interesting insights into the interlinkage between politics and memory culture. See Martin Sabrow et al. (eds.), *Wohin treibt die DDR-Erinnerung? Dokumentation einer Debatte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2007). The commission concluded that the new concept for memorialization of the GDR (which it was commissioned to develop) should "contribute to raising awareness about the dictatorial nature (*Diktaturcharakter*) of the GDR (…) as well as to the honoring of resistance and opposition. [It should also] map the complexity, the normalization processes (*Veralltäglichung*) and the 'constructive contradiction' of the GDR, and put these into the historical relational dimension of the German-German dual statehood (*Doppelstaatlichtkeit*) (…) and of the East-West conflict" (p. 11).

[28] Martin Sabrow, "Die DDR erinnern". In: Sabrow (ed.), *Erinnerungsorte der DDR* (München: C.H. Beck 2009), pp. 18-19.

[29] Hubertus Knabe, *Die Täter sind unter uns. Über das Schönreden der SED-Diktatur* (Berlin: Propyläen 2007); idem, *Honeckers Erben. Die Wahrheit über DIE LINKE* (Berlin: Propyläen 2009).

[30] Klaus Schroeder, *Der SED Staat. Partei, Staat und Gesellschaft* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag 1998); Eckhard Jesse (ed.), *Totalitarismus im 20. Jahrhundert: Eine Bilanz der internationalen Forschung* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 1999).

Yet other historians emphasize the limitations of totalitarianism, and especially the GDR's lack of total oversight and control over its population. Writing about the GDR in the early 1980s, Günter Gaus coined the term "niche society" to describe a situation in which citizens withdrew into specific "niches" in the private sphere to refute the state efforts at control and politicization. Such niches were both intimate and apolitical, and offered citizens an individual space beyond the state's purview.[31] Yet as the notion of niche society implied a strict division between the state and its citizens, it obscured the ways in which citizens simultaneously engaged with the state. Later scholars have tried to capture the ways in which society and the regime *accommodated* to each other, by pointing to the many ways in which citizens were linked to the state, and participated in its institutions while at the same time challenging its politics. This idea is the basis of what Sabrow termed the *Arrangementsgedächtnis* (memory of accommodation), and it is also reflected in Konrad Jarausch's term "welfare dictatorship",[32] as well as in Mary Fulbrook's concept of an "adapted dictatorship". As Fulbrook points out,

> Implausibly large numbers – perhaps one in six of the population – were involved in one way or another in what might be called the micro-systems of power through which GDR society worked. This system cannot be described in terms of an extended 'state' that was 'doing something' to a 'society' conceived of as separate from the 'state': rather it was the very way society as a whole was structured.[33]

The "accommodation thesis" gained prominence especially amongst historians who study daily life in the GDR. It should be noted that by pointing to the ways in which society and regime were inextricably linked, these scholars do not seek to question the undemocratic nature of the GDR. Rather, they prioritize social and cultural history over the sole preoccupation with politics – and especially over the "system question". This approach produced case studies on cultural life and leisure in the GDR.[34] In his account of the *Kulturbund*, the GDR's mass organization for the conduct and propagation of culture, Helmut Meier concluded that this organization was both "part of the political system and a place for

[31] Günter Gaus, *Wo Deutschland liegt: Eine Ortsbestimmung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe 1983).
[32] See Konrad Jarausch: "Care and Coercion: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship". In: Konrad Jarausch (ed.) *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-cultural History of the GDR* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books 1999), pp. 47-69, which offers a good oversight of the totalitarianism theory and its flaws.
[33] Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2008 [2005]), p. 236.
[34] Including on the organization of culture in factories (Annette Schuhmann, "Veredelung der Produzenten oder Freizeitpolitik? Betriebliche Kulturarbeit vor 1970". In: *Potsdamer Bulletin*, 28/29 (2003), pp. 73-78) and on the national level (Helmut Meier, "Der Kulturbund der DDR in den siebziger Jahren. Bestandteil des politischen Systems und Ort kultureller Selbstbetätigung". In: Evemarie Badstübner (ed.), *Befremdlich Anders: Leben in der DDR* [Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2000], pp. 599-625).

cultural self-actuation".[35] Mary Fulbrook likewise argues that East Germans in fact had various reasons to join the state-led mass organizations of the GDR, including the "perks" that membership might bring.[36] She points out that in some organizations, participation was so widespread and integrated into everyday life that it appeared as mere routine to join them.[37]

Obviously, people participated in organized culture and leisure activities (although not necessarily as many as GDR propaganda suggested) because this suited their interests.[38] The above-mentioned studies on the GDR correspond to a broader trend in research on how citizens of former socialist states participated in state-organized activities, and how they made these activities personally meaningful in ways that were not always foreseen by the regimes.[39] This suggests that people were creative in shaping their lives within the confines of the possible, and that they were often more limited by *the state of the GDR* – its inability to fulfill its promises – than by *the GDR state*. This vision of the GDR as a state that had good intentions, and that provided room for a good life when politics were ignored, is reflected in the popularity of *Ostalgie* (literally: "Eastalgia"; nostalgia for the GDR) from the late 1990s. The causes, and particularly the content, of this *Ostalgie* are still debated,[40] but expressions of *Ostalgie* are rooted in recollections of everyday life in the GDR, in which specific consumer goods are remembered as typical of the East German state, and as "familiar" and "cozy".

The "totalitarian" and "accomodationist" visions described above do not so much disagree over the nature of the political regime of the GDR. Their disagreement is rather over how strongly people's lives were shaped by politics on a day-to-day basis. In the case of *Ostalgie*, this ties in with a critique of unified Germany – especially when coupled with a certain disappointment with personal conditions since 1990. The relatedness of nostalgia to the present also implies that its underlying notions of the past might well differ from one nostalgic person to the other – ranging from an "apolitical" view on the personal past (concomitant with the *Arrangementsgedächtnis*) to a more politicized critique of the present.

[35] In the 1970s, the *Kulturbund* was part of the "National Front" of political parties and mass organizations in the GDR. Meier, "Der Kulturbund der DDR in den siebziger Jahren".
[36] As an example, one could think of access to holiday spots for members of the GDR's trade union, the Free German Trade Union League (*Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*; FDGB). Fulbrook, *The People's State*, p. 225.
[37] This was for instance the case with the GDR's children's organization, the Young Pioneers, which was organized in such a way that it was seen as a normal part of ordinary school life. Fulbrook, *The People's State*, pp. 127-130.
[38] Esther von Richthofen, *Bringing Culture to the Masses: Control, Compromise and Participation in the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books 2009), pp. 14-15.
[39] Including, for instance, the seminal work of Alexey Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2005).
[40] There is a substantial body of literature on this subject. I will discuss the issue of *Ostalgie*, and the problems of this concept for discussing the outlooks of the OKV, in more detail in chapter 1.

Such differences are not unimportant: and it must be emphasized that the upsurge of *Ostalgie* in East Germany has not led to the emergence of a strong revisionist GDR milieu.

This brings us to the third way of remembering the GDR. The *Fortschrittsgedächtnis* views the GDR as having been a legitimate attempt to build a new state. In particular, its adherents regard state socialism as a real, valid and justified attempt at establishing an alternative to West German capitalism. This understanding leans heavily on official political and historical discourses promoted in the GDR – and specifically on the idea of a state based on the ideals of antifascism, after the atrocities committed by the Germans under National Socialism. In the GDR, this narrative was not only supported by the regime and its adherents. Crucially, it has been suggested that this broad acceptance of the necessity of the GDR as a project was one of the reasons why there was for a long time little opposition in East Germany: there was a leftist opposition to the GDR that was dissatisfied with the state's leadership, but these leftists did not want to give up the GDR as a state.[41] Antifascist legitimation narratives of the German Democratic Republic were fed by the observation that in West Germany, there was indeed a substantial continuation of fascist personnel structures – an observation that the GDR authorities were constantly bringing back to attention, for example by publishing a series of "brown books" (*Braunbücher*) on influential Nazis in the Federal Republic of Germany.[42] Although historians later established the accuracy of the information contained in the "brown books",[43] they clearly functioned as propaganda for the East German regime; and obviously, the SED maintained a very specific ideal of antifascism, and of what an antifascist state should look like. Yet after the demise of the SED's one-party-rule in the late 1980s, GDR citizens who had been attracted to the reformist vision of a new, East German "third way" gave up this view; today, the view of the GDR as a "legitimate alternative" is obviously a minority opinion in Germany.[44] Instead, both the "dictatorship"

[41] After 1990, there appeared to be almost a general consensus that the fall of the SED could not but lead to the unification of the two Germanies. Ideas of a "third way" for the GDR on the principle of a new form of "reform socialism" were popular among civil rights activists, artists and intellectuals, but not amongst the population at large. For more on this issue, see Markus Trömmer, *Der verhaltene Gang in die deutsche Einheit. Das Verhältnis zwischen den Oppositionsgruppen und der (SED-)PDS im letzten Jahr der DDR* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang 2002).

[42] One of these *Braunbücher* that listed former Nazis in the West German "government, economy, administration, army, justice system and science" became the object of a controversy when Federal German authorities confiscated its copies at the Frankfurt Book Fair of 1967. *Braunbuch. Kriegs- und Naziverbrecher in der Bundesrepublik und in West-Berlin. Staat, Wirtschaft, Verwaltung, Armee, Justiz, Wissenschaft* (Berlin: Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1965); Eckart Conze, Norbert Frei, Peter Hayes, Moshe Zimmermann, *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit. Deutsche Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik* (München: Karl Blessing Verlag 2010), p. 18.

[43] Conze et al., *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit*, p. 18.

[44] A study conducted ten years after the fall of the Wall suggests that most of the former dissidents by that time had also come to see unification as the best possible outcome of the *Wende* – unlike the former functionaries

and "accommodation" understandings of the GDR regard the political system of the GDR as having been wrong – and the people who supported it as morally corrupt.

The *Fortschrittsgedächtnis* is most vividly perpetuated in the group that this dissertation is about, the OKV-related associations. For OKV activists, the memory of progress not only justifies the GDR as it was, but it also delegitimizes the developments after 1989. This puts them in a more narrowly defined milieu of people that still dispute German unification. In a review of GDR memory in Germany, Sabrow depicted these groups as follows:

> … there exists a parallel 'environmental memory' in politically and professionally structured networks of former GDR elites, which cultivates a 'memory of voluntary annexation' (*Anschlusserinnerung*[45]), which understands the GDR as the 'normal state' (*Normalstaat*) and unification as a colonial submission with the agreement of those colonized, in a conscious analogy to the *Anschluss* of Austria to the German Reich in 1938.[46]

Within the OKV, many of the GDR's ideological schemes for understanding the world remain current, in spite of the fall of the GDR, and despite the very critical political and historiographical discourses that have since been developed in Germany. This resilience of GDR narratives within the OKV raises questions about how GDR modes of political thinking were trained and maintained.

Political epistemics

One academic work that will guide my approach to the longevity of GDR political thinking in post-*Wende* organizations of former Stasi co-workers and GDR state representatives is Andreas Glaeser's impressive 2011 monograph *Political Epistemics: The Secret Police, the Opposition, and the End of East German Socialism.* Glaeser is interested in a question that is crucial for understanding the peaceful transition from socialism to liberal democracy in 1989:

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who are the subject of this dissertation. See Eckhard Jesse (ed.), *Eine Revolution und ihre Folgen. 14 Bürgerrechtler ziehen Bilanz: Jens Reich, Konrad Weiss, Marianne Birthler, Vera Lengsfeld, Günter Nooke, Wolfgang Templin, Markus Meckel, Erhart Neubert, Freya Klier, Rainer Eppelmann, Edelbert Richter, Ulrike Poppe, Friedrich Schorlemmer, Joachim Gauck* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag 2000).

[45] The term "Anschluss" refers to Austria's "voluntary joining" of the Deutsche Reich in 1938.

[46] "Parallel existiert ein weiteres und in Netzwerken politischer und fachlicher Natur organisiertes Milieugedächtnisses früherer DDR-Eliten, das eine vereinigungskritische Anschlusserinnerung pflegt, die die DDR als Normalstaat und die Vereinigung als koloniale Unterwerfung mit Zustimmung der Kolonisierten in gezielter Analogie zum Anschluss Österreichs an das Deutsche Reich 1938 erscheint." Martin Sabrow, "Der ostdeutsche Herbst 1989 – Wende oder Revolution? " (Paper presented at the conference on "Herrschaftsverlust und Machtverfall" in honor of Hans-Ulrich Thamer, LWL-Landesmuseum für Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte, Münster, 11 October 2008).

why was the Stasi unable to prevent the mass protests of that year from toppling the regime, in spite of the fact that it was well-informed about long-lingering dissatisfaction and the growing opposition in society?[47] At first sight, this question seems to be rather remote from the issues we are dealing with in the thesis; but as I will argue below, Glaeser's approach provides a good entry gate for coming to terms with the resilience of GDR political thinking in an unsupportive environment.

There are of course several interpretations as to why the Stasi did not shoot at the demonstrators. The security service did not get clear orders, as the Party/state top was in complete disarray; the protests of the population assumed a magnitude that they understood could not be crushed without much bloodshed, which would have gone far beyond the levels of violence that even Stasi members were prepared to apply; and in contrast to earlier uprisings, this time the GDR leadership could not count on Soviet help to crush the unrest.[48] One other explanation would be that the Party, and by extension the Stasi as its "shield and sword", had itself lost faith in the socialist ideology, and therefore fell into paralysis.[49] It is this last interpretation in particular that Glaeser expands upon.

The central argument in Glaeser's work is that Stasi officers were well aware of problems in the GDR, but that they were driven and inhibited by a specific "political epistemology" – the "historically specific politics-oriented knowledge-making practices".[50] According to Glaeser, the answer to the question why secret police officers did "not even fire a single shot in [the GDR's] defense when its very existence came under threat", although they had certainly been trained to do so, can be found in the "increasing disorientation of party state functionaries caused by an accelerating discrepancy between lived experience and official party descriptions of life in the GDR."[51] This raises the question "why … the party state [was] unable to develop more successful action-guiding understandings of itself in a

[47] Andreas Glaeser, *Political Epistemics: The Secret Police, the Opposition, and the End of East German Socialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2011).
[48] Walter Süβ, *Staatssicherheit am Ende. Warum es den Mächtigen nicht gelang, 1989 eine Revolution zu verhindern* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag 1999), 742-52; John O. Koehler, *Stasi: The Untold Story of the East German Secret Police* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press 1999), 403-10; Gary Bruce, *The Firm: The Inside Story of the Stasi* (New York: Oxford University Press 2010), 177-80; Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2005), p. 293.
[49] Concomitant with Glaeser's interpretation, Walter Süβ describes the Stasi's "unsolvable dilemma" in the following words: "the path of ideological purity must not be left, but at the same time 'new paths' should be found." Süβ, *Staatssicherheit am Ende*, p. 219.
[50] Gleaser, *Political Epistemics*, p. XXVI.
[51] Ibid., p. XXI

wider world."[52] His conclusion is that the failure of the East German state, and the inactivity of the Stasi during its final hours, can ultimately be attributed to the failure of ideological doctrine to shape effective *political* "understandings". Such understandings are a central element in political epistemics.[53]

In other words, the regime change has to be understood above all by coming to terms with the inability of the system to cope with oppositional opinions, despite its sophisticated facilities and overwhelming resources. In my thesis I argue that the contemporary OKV organizations are guided by the same political epistemics that already failed to apprehend changes in 1989. Today these same epistemics lead to the continuing self-isolation of the OKV organizations, and therefore to their failure to mobilize other forces in society that might otherwise support them in reaching their goals. At the same time this mode of political understanding gives the OKV members the strength to defy any contention.

Glaeser conceptualizes knowledge of the state and society as "an ongoing process of orientation" that is shaped and reshaped through personal encounters with institutions. These institutions validate our understandings or fail to do so. In turn, such understandings influence people's activities, and shape the way in which they interact with institutions, and influence them in a feedback loop. This goes for both citizens and state officials.[54] Understandings thus constitute the practical knowledge of how to behave and fulfil certain functions in a community. In the case of the GDR, and especially in the case of its official institutions, this was heavily shaped by the socialist ideology of the state.

Understandings are of fundamental importance to individuals because they provide agency: they "sort out *what we are reacting to and why we are acting at all*" and "provide a notion of *what to do*, that is, *how* to react to the situation that is already understood to some degree. They supply discursive, emotive, and kinesthetic templates to *direct* action."[55] Such actions in turn lead to a validation of the underlying understandings – and institutionalize those particular understandings, by making them context-independent and generally shared. This institutionalization of understandings provides efficiency to decision-making and

[52] Ibid. Note that this question pertains to the inactivity of the Stasi rather than to the fall of the GDR itself. Although Glaeser argues that the failure of East Germany's, or state-socialism's more widely, political epistemics should be seen as a grand theory of socialism's demise parallel to economic and political explanations to this event (XVI), elsewhere he differentiates between (unmentioned) direct causes of the collapse of socialism and the failure of epistemics as an underlying problem explaining the regime's failure to adjust itself to developments in society. See: Glaeser, "Power/Knowledge Failure. Epistemic Practices and Ideologies of the Secret Police in Former East Germany". In: *Social Analysis* 47(1) (2003), pp. 22-23.
[53] Glaeser, *Political Epistemics*, p. XXVI.
[54] Ibid., p. XVIII.
[55] Ibid., p. 38; emphasis in the original.

coordination processes with likeminded people, be it in the Stasi or in dissident groups. The danger is that this process institutionalizes the understandings to such a degree that they become fixed fetishes that can never again be questioned.[56]

To appreciate this argument, it is important to realize that our understandings are central to our identity. Hence they are largely formed in relation to the group (or groups) that we belong to or seek to identify with. There is thus a distinct emotional factor that makes us cling on to those understandings that we share with our environment.[57] And the same holds true for the emotive justification of authority: we tend to put trust in those we agree with, because this feels good.[58]

Networks of authority are based on shared political understandings and emotions. This was especially true for SED cadres, Stasi officers, and others who identified strongly with the socialist state – and it is still alive in OKV circles. In the GDR, this identification was not questioned either by private interactions with people who did not share their ideology, because centralized housing policies often landed cadres in housing blocks with colleagues who shared their political convictions. And as the GDR gave no public room to other views, such networks of authority coincided with the state and its central institutions. Moreover, the narrowly defined concept of state socialist ideology was profoundly shaped by the moral authority of a generation of "veteran communists" whose "antifascist struggle" formed the foundation myth of the East German socialist state.[59] This moral authority contributed to the reluctance of a next generation to refute the political views and policies of the founding fathers of the GDR – ultimately adding to a climate in which their visions could not be disputed.[60] And as we will see in chapter two, for OKV leaders too the relationship with "veteran communists" is very important.

[56] Glaeser, *Political Epistemics*, p. 42.
[57] Ibid., p. 180.
[58] Aside from a mnemonic community, the OKV could also be described as an emotional community; that is, a community that can be defined by its particular norms of valuating and expressing emotions (Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2006]). Both memorization and dealing with emotions in the OKV are however closely bound to its members' understandings of life in the GDR and after - and thus to what Glaeser describes with the concept of political epistemics.
[59] Communists who joined the KPD before 1933 are usually referred to as "old communists", in analogy to those who joined the communist party in Russia before the 1917 Revolution. In her study on the lives of German "old communists" -- in essence the ruling class from the GDR's beginning to its demise --, Catherine Epstein uses the term "veteran communists" as a reference to the importance of their participation in the resistance against the Nazis. Catherine Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and Their Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2003), p. 3.
[60] Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, p. 232.

From Glaeser's perspective, before 1989 the Stasi did *not* suffer from a lack of ideological orientation as such; to the contrary, the security service had a strongly internalized orientation/epistemics. But this orientation was extremely inflexible, and prevented Stasi officers from adapting to the new historical situation. The ideological doctrine remained firmly in place, yet the political understandings based on this ideology were increasingly ineffective. This is also visible from statements of former Stasi members, who, with hindsight, reported of doubts of the political course in the 1980s, yet at the same time remained attached to the GDR's state ideology. As we shall see later on, the same argument can also be applied to the "OKV identity".

As Glaeser demonstrates, Stasi officers were remarkably isolated from people with other views – that is from those whom they were supposed to monitor and control. This relative isolation resulted from the surveillance methods employed by the secret service. The Stasi operated a widespread network of informants, or "unofficial employees" (*Informelle Mitarbeiter*, IMs), and it primarily relied on the reports of IMs that had infiltrated dissident groups. Even officers who investigated the opposition therefore hardly had any direct encounters with dissidents, instead relying on the information mediated by their informants.[61] That is, contacts with the object of investigation were "outsourced", and the Stasi became self-sufficient.

Even so, by the late 1980s Stasi officers must have been aware of the growing dissatisfaction amongst the population that obviously contradicted their own ideological view of the GDR. Such contradictions had to be somehow rendered innocuous. Glaeser discusses a number of counteractions and relativizing strategies that officers employed to weaken such contradictions by "mak[ing] the troubling validations appear less relevant."[62] Because many of these strategies are clearly discernible in the memories narrated by OKV members, it is worth quoting Glaeser at some length:

> First, in cases where officers felt treated unjustly, the socialist theodicy offered two ways out: either the officer could see that he had failed to self-objectify properly, or he could attribute the course of the events to the failings of a single superior, an individual person who did not get it right. Second, the typical line of defense against seemingly irrational orders or policies was building on understandings about the economy of knowledge. According to these rationalizing understandings, each and every person

[61] Glaeser, "Power/Knowledge Failure", p. 15.
[62] Glaeser, *Political Epistemics*, p. 545: "Counteractions affirm newly emerging understandings resonating negatively with the diagnosis of 'contradiction,' thus weakening it indirectly. Relativizations work through networks of authority in which meta-understandings are mobilized to show that the troubling validations experienced do not actually mean what they were taken to mean."

> knew only a small slice of the whole. The necessity of secrecy prevented a more liberal sharing of information, and therefore only those higher up could judge situations properly because they had more of an overview. Third, actions or measures that did not live up to ideas of proper communist behavior could be justified as necessitated by the particular historical context, as a tactic [or] a mere compromise necessary now for the greater good of the socialist project in the long run. Finally, fourth, a most important strategy was to admit the failings of socialism, its imperfect state, but then to point out that this imperfect form of socialism was still far superior to capitalism with its contemptuous logic of exploitation. This last move found expression in a frequently evoked trope. The GDR was described as "the best GDR there is" (*die beste DDR, die es gibt*).[63]

Glaeser concludes that the Stasi had, in essence, the material at hand to question the viability of the state as it was. Yet the understandings of politics and the state – in particular, of the apparent scientifically-proven leading role of the Party in society and the Manichaean worldview that only discerned between friend and foe without the possibility for constructive critique, left no room to identify problems – and discuss their solutions – within the system. This ultimately had to do with the logic that saw any public identification of problems as a form of critique to the party line which was, in its (in)famous self-celebratory song, "always right" (*Die Partei, die Partei, die hat immer recht*[64]). Thus, the very act of discussing problems qualified a person as a bad communist – and this logic led to a situation in which convinced communists in fact did see problems, but did not dare to discuss them as this would greatly endanger their professional but also social positions. After all, they still identified with the state and its ideologies, and although they registered contradictions under socialism, they stopped well before the point of thinking these contradictions through to what would perhaps have been their logical consequence – namely, that the particular form of state socialism represented by the East German regime was in fact unviable.

Today, most OKV members will admit, with hindsight, that the GDR was unviable "as it was". Yet they also remain convinced that the GDR was indeed a good attempt at a socialist state, and that its failure was largely the outcome of historical developments and related to the Cold War environment in which the state developed. Thus, the GDR failed not because of its internal, socialist ideology, but because of its external, capitalist enemies. This allows OKV activists to continue to defend the GDR and its ideology. The above-sketched isolation paradigm can also be applied to the OKV environments of today. They are consciously self-isolating, and thereby protect their "political epistemics" from challenges that come from

[63] Glaeser, *Political Epistemics*, p. 547.
[64] Louis Fürnberg, *Lied der Partei* (first performed in 1950).

outside of their group. As we will see in chapter one, OKV members develop and cultivate common stereotypical responses to some of those challenges, like criticism as to how the GDR dealt with the 1953 uprising, as to the human tragedy of the Berlin Wall, and as to the pervasiveness of the Stasi in GDR society; and in chapter five I will discuss how, when contacting others for concerted action, OKV activists cannot give up on demanding that any potential partner must subscribe to their own political epistemics, which seriously inhibits the organization's outreach. Thus in many ways, contemporary practices within the OKV go back to the ideological environment of the Stasi and other state institutions that most of its members were part of before 1989.

The Stasi stigma

The self-isolation of OKV members goes hand in hand with their public stigmatization. This puts pressure on former Stasi officers, and limits their opportunities of goal-oriented action.

Spurred by the accessibility of the Stasi archives, scholars have since the early 1990s produced a considerable body of literature on the GDR's former secret service. Much of this work is carried out by researchers affiliated to the Stasi documentation center (of the *Bundesbeauftragter für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes*; BStU). Established in 1990 to deal with the paper legacy of the GDR's former secret service, this government agency was directed consecutively by several prominent GDR human rights activists.[65]

The opening of the Stasi archives revealed the identities of many of the "informal employees" (IMs) of the Ministry of State Security (MfS), that is, its many unpaid but contracted agents who, according to Glaeser, formed a huge net of sources for information that the core Stasi officers were not able to fully make sense of. High-ranking East Germans were identified as Stasi informants.[66] The public pressure on IMs thus enroots the idea that the GDR system permeated the whole of society. By relating the system to concrete individual biographies, the Stasi files are an important source for studying life experiences in the GDR.[67] Especially members of the SED successor party PDS (later *Die Linke*) were regularly attacked as former Stasi spies, including its leading figure, Gregor Gysi, who in the GDR was a lawyer

[65] For a comprehensive list of literature see BStU, *Bibliografie zum Staatssicherheitsdienst der DDR, Stand 31.12.2015*. Accessed 3 November 2016: http://www.bstu.bund.de/DE/Wissen/Bibliothek/Auswahl-Bibliographie/auswahl-bibliographie_node.html. The BStU publishes a series of publications (*MfS Handbuch: Anatomie der Staatssicherheit*). Its 28 volumes (so far) shed light on the structure and functioning of the Stasi by looking at individual service units and key issues. For how the Stasi operated locally, see Gary Bruce, *The Firm: The Inside Story of the Stasi* (New York: Oxford University Press 2010).

[66] The case of Manfred Stolpe being maybe the most famous example.

[67] Barbara Miller, *The Stasi Files Unveiled: Guilt and Compliance in a Unified Germany* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2004).

for many dissidents. Gysi managed to clear himself of any concrete charges, and in response sued persons and institutions accusing him of implications with the Stasi. The controversy continues up to the present time; the *Linke* is regularly criticized for its refusal to unequivocally distance itself from the GDR past.[68] When in 2014 *Linke* politician Bodo Ramelow (himself from West Germany) became prime minister of the East German *Bundesland* Thuringia, this could only happen after the *Linke* agreed to label the GDR an "*Unrechtsstaat*" in the coalition agreement.[69]

While the 173.000 "informal co-workers" (IMs) of the Stasi could still defend themselves by arguing that they had been pressured into cooperation, this argument is hard to sustain in the case of the 91.015 official Stasi employees whom the GDR had in paid service by 1989.[70] Most of them became unemployed after the dissolution of the GDR's secret service, and their identities were made public. Some of these today form the core of OKV branches. Stasi officers were now no longer the ones who interrogated in the name of the socialist "good", but were themselves interrogated in the name of the new, democratic and unified Germany. Several former SED and Stasi co-workers were accused and convicted of crimes against humanity.[71] A number of agents who conducted intelligence work in the West, including some who would later unite in the OKV,[72] received serious prison sentences. With the exception of a few who subsequently went into security companies, many did not find new skilled employment. The stigma also extends to persons who did not work for the Stasi but in other "professions close to the regime". In a state-led labour market as in the GDR, this included not only functionaries of the SED party and the state organs but also university

[68] See also chapter 5.

[69] Die Linke, SPD, B'90/Grünen, "Koalitionsvertrag zwischen den Parteien DIE LINKE, SPD, BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN für die 6. Wahlperiode des Thüringer Landtags: Thüringen gemeinsam voranbringen – demokratisch, sozial, ökologisch". 2014. Final version, 20 November 2014; p. 2.

[70] Roughly 1 on every 60 GDR citizens above the age of 18 was working, professionally or informally for the Stasi. These numbers do not include people whose relation with the MfS had been broken (e.g. due to retirement) before 1989. Jens Gieseke, "Schild und Schwert der Partei – Das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit". Printed in: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Im Visier der Geheimpolizei: Der kommunistische Überwachungs- und Repressionsapparat 1945-1989: XVIII. Bautzen Forum,10. und 11. Mai 2007* (Leipzig: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2007), pp. 21-32; here p. 24.

[71] Taking into account the Stasi's reputation for human rights abuses, the number of convictions has been surprisingly low. Although investigations into a large number of specific misconducts were begun in the 1990s, these were often hampered by lack of evidence and by mismatches between GDR and Federal German laws (see e.g. Anne Sa'adah, *Germany's Second Chance: Trust, Justice, and Democratization* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1998).

[72] Former Stasi spies in the west have their own circle (*AG Aufklärer*) within the GRH, one of the OKV's larger organizations. http://www.kundschafter-ddr.de/. See also chapter 3.

personnel,[73] managers in the cultural sector, as well as all professions that involved travelling abroad (e.g. foreign trade agents). Even if these people were less targeted in public debates, they equally lost their positions as well as their social status.

This elimination of GDR elites has led some of them to claim that the West was applying *Siegerjustiz*, or "victor's justice".[74] Indeed, from all former socialist countries of Central/Eastern Europe that went through the cardinal transformations of the 1990s, it was in the GDR that the break with the past was most strict and consequential: the old state was dissolved, and the old elites were largely replaced, often by people from former West Germany.[75]

Approaches and structure of this thesis

This thesis is thus about a significant amount of people formerly close to the regime, who reacted to their loss of status, and to the public pressure on them, by setting up interest organizations to defy the FRG. I will argue that their refusal of the new regime can be partly attributed to post-unification negative experiences and the feeling of exclusion. Yet the root cause for continuing to support the GDR is of an epistemic and emotive nature: admitting that the GDR was, in the end, a failure would mean giving up deeply held ideological and political convictions, and admitting that one's own life activities were unwarranted.

In the following chapters I explore various approaches to the subject of my study. In chapter one, I focus on the phenomenon of nostalgia, which, I argue, is a driving force for uniting in OKV groups. But this nostalgia concept needs to be nuanced: in the case of OKV we are not dealing with the "banal" nostalgia (to borrow from the concept of "banal nationalism") that gives former GDR citizens a warm feeling when they detect a *Trabant,* or a *Schwalbe* motorscooter, on the streets of East Berlin. Rather, I conceptualize OKV nostalgia not as the longing for a past but as a longing for the longings in the past: the failure of the GDR as a state project is acknowledged, but the belief in the potential of the GDR, as a promise, is still alive. Nostalgia is connected to memory, and OKV organizations put a lot of

[73] Renate Mayntz (ed.), *Aufbruch und Reform von oben: ostdeutsche Universitäten im Transformationsprozess* (Frankfurt am Main 1994); Sven Vollrath, *Zwischen Selbstbestimmung und Intervention: Der Umbau der Humboldt Universität 1989-1996* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag 2008).

[74] For a detailed account of the many problems in doing and defining justice after the collapse of the GDR, see Sa'adah, *Germany's Second Chance*, especially chapter 4 "Successor Justice: The Appeal to Common Sense and the Redefinition of Justice", pp. 143-188.

[75] For the different fate of the state security in Poland, see Maria Los and Andrzej Zybertowicz, *Privatizing the Police State: The Case of Poland* (Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave 2000).

emphasis on maintaining the memory of the GDR as a just state. The various aspects of this *Fortschrittsgedächtnis* (to use Sabrow's term) are discussed on the basis of how my interview partners expressed their nostalgic feelings for the past and their rejection of the present.

In chapter two I discuss individual biographies of OKV activists, according to the narratives that I recorded in my interviews with them. Here my approach for understanding the "OKV mentality" is historical: I argue that the OKV is largely directed by a generation of men and women who share the experience of Second World War disruption (even if they were too young to serve at the front), and for whom the GDR presented not just opportunities for self-fulfillment and upward mobility but also a redemption for the failure of the Germans to resist the temptations of Nazi ideology. Hence the strong antifascist motive that is central in all OKV statements and publications, and that seems so out of tune today. Antifascist convictions among the OKV members are one-to-one copies of the GDR "antifascist myth", that is, East Germany's self-presentation as the "better" Germany, accompanied by accusations hurled against West Germany that the early FRG was in fact a continuation of the Nazi regime. The ideological dogma that fascism is just a radical form of capitalism makes it possible to completely reject present-day Germany too. Rationalizations for this dogma are found in recent NATO and UN military operations in which unified Germany has participated.

Part I of this thesis, comprising of chapters one and two, is thus based on the life experiences of individuals whom I interviewed; their personal accounts I use for clarifying the emotions they share, and for establishing broader patterns in their experiences and how they valued them when talking to me. The peculiarity of the OKV emotions is that they are coupled with hardline political convictions: nostalgia, as an emotion, is reproduced in memory practices, and hardened by the persistence of GDR-made political dogmas. Nostalgia and memory are therefore closely connected to present-oriented activities.

Part II of this thesis comprises an organizational analysis of the OKV. Associations affiliated with the OKV uphold a broad variety of agendas. In chapter three I attempt to give an overview of the spectrum of the OKV affiliates, to demonstrate the whole range of their focus areas. While the bigger OKV organizations concentrate on the core tasks of lobbying and of going to court, the smaller groups – with sometimes just a handful of members – are equally important to the overall OKV umbrella: they provide the ideational glue, and in particular the memory function that is connected to the GDR political and cultural heritage. In addition to the big OKV member organizations that I already mentioned above (ISOR, GBM,

GRH), chapter three also discusses tiny clubs of activists that fight for the protection of certain buildings, monuments, songs and even GDR-type dachas. I trace the genealogy of OKV's wide spectrum out of one particular member organization, the GBM. Of particular interest are those associations that have managed to establish a strong local presence in some parts of Berlin, for they were most successful in linking up with interests that go beyond the core ex-GDR identity.

Part III of the present study (chapters four and five) deal with the political work of the OKV, and evaluate their functions and their achievements. In chapter four I investigate one of the big OKV member associations that engage in lobbying for Stasi interests, ISOR. ISOR has been quite successful in suing the German state for the pension cuts that the Bundestag imposed on former GDR political elites and groups "close to the regime". Given that the GDR did not provide its citizens with the opportunity to sue the government, I pose the question why ISOR chose to adapt this legalistic approach: going to Germany's highest court, the Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe, not only requires familiarity with legal practices in unified Germany but also a principled decision "to proceed according to the rules", that is, to abstain from more contentious strategies. In fact, OKV has no reputation of making trouble in ways that are not publicly accepted: in leftist street demonstrations, OKV joins in but does not take the lead. In this chapter I not only analyze the legal activities of ISOR and its lobbying of politicians but also explore the legal experience that ISOR men and women had accumulated in the GDR. I come to the conclusion that GDR practices of settling disputes by mediation and by petitioning can be seen as blueprints for the legal activities of ISOR. Ironically, the court successes that ISOR has claimed have given many former GDR social groups exemption from the pension cuts that were imposed on former GDR elites in 1991 – but not the core of its Stasi constituency. As in 2015 the legal venue for reclaiming the original pensions have dried out, I argue that also ISOR is turning inwards, and its main focus now lies on community-building, like in most other OKV units.

In chapter five I continue the discussion on how OKV associations relate to possible partners or allies beyond the GDR elite environment. Of particular interest here is the GDR's ruling party SED, which reinvented itself first in the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism), then in the Linkspartei, and finally in the *Die Linke* of our days. I argue that the more the party attempted to reform itself, the more it alienated itself from the circles that make up OKV. This transformation of the SED successor party into a broad radical left party is still continuing, and the party is marred with confrontations between Marxist and "traditional"

leftists (close to OKV thinking) on the one hand, and an increasing "new left" segment (which feeds also from west German party members) on the other. For this chapter, I had the opportunity to interview former SED politician Hans Modrow, who has served as the OKV's anchor in *Die Linke*. But as Modrow was also the last GDR prime minister who "liberated" the party from its Stasi, his authority is not unchallenged among OKV members.

This final chapter is also the place where I address the *Freundeskreis Palast der Republik*, an association that has been struggling for the preservation, and then for the memorialization, of East Berlin's GDR People's Palace. I selected this group for another case study because the *Freundeskreis* could have linked up with other citizens' initiatives beyond the OKV that also struggled against the destruction of the building – in particular with young occupiers that used the empty structure for art and other purposes. Yet such a cooperation failed, and I argue that it did so because of the OKV's unwillingness, or inability, to accept any group that does not subscribe to their form of GDR memory, and their political epistemics, even if they share with them more tangible goals like the preservation of the Palace.

In the conclusion I return to the basic question of my thesis: the tension between an orientation towards the past and the unfolding of pragmatic activities in the new state that the OKV people reject. Are OKV organizations indeed a bunch of *Ewiggestrigen*, or "people stuck in the past", stubbornly refusing to accept the present and clinging on to a heritage that has completely outlived itself? Or is the memory of the past, and partly also its re-enactment, not perhaps a peculiar way to make yourself at home in the present? That OKV is not a threat to the German constitution has been acknowledged by German state security agencies; and the age of the activists makes any turn to more contentious policies unlikely. OKV is harmless, in spite of their partly militant rhetoric and propaganda; and it is exactly their ideological attachment to the GDR above their material interests that precluded any meaningful alliance-formation that could have converted the numerical strength of OKV into effective political pressure. I therefore conclude that aside from the pragmatic goal-oriented activities of OKV and its branches, the major function of all OKV associations is self-preservation, and this in the double sense: preserving the organizational forms (which is difficult, since their professed ideology and their focus on the interest of a decreasing group of activists precludes them from attracting new members, or even sympathizers), and preserving the personal sense of dignity, of individual achievement in a state that projected itself as a harmonious collective. Together, these difficulties account for the self-isolation of the OKV: only in a controlled environment

that is insulated as much as possible from contrary opinions can OKV members continue to live according to a worldview that is rejected by the vast majority of society. Marginalization imposed from outside is thus resented by the OKV, but at the same time paradoxically also encouraged as a strategy for organizational and epistemic survival.

PART I:
MEMORY AND IDEOLOGY

Chapter 1:

The Emotional Factor: Memory, Nostalgia and Politics

Part one of this thesis discusses the OKV's understanding of historical developments by focussing on the way in which individual narrators situate their own life histories in the contexts of the GDR and unified Germany. In this chapter we will look at the way in which several of the tropes on the GDR past are woven into the life accounts of OKV members and sympathisers, on the basis of interviews I conducted during several research trips from 2012 to 2015. These people share what political scientist David Patton in his book on the history of PDS-*Die Linke* after 1989, calls "distinctly Eastern biographies".[1] Patton uses the term mainly to refer to the life trajectories specifically of former GDR functionaries, especially the vitas of party officials who came to dominate the PDS since the special congress of 1989. He argues that in their biographies we find a shared commitment to the GDR, which was coupled with careers as party and state functionaries. After 1990, these "distinctly Eastern" careers set them aside as people implicated with the former socialist state, so that it was difficult for them to find work in the newly unified Germany.

While Patton uses the term for a narrow group of people, I suggest that the category of distinctly Eastern biographies is applicable to all persons who strongly identified with the GDR and its politics through their biographies, whether state functionaries or not.[2] As the chapter will show, all persons interviewed adhere to what can be called the "OKV view on the GDR". This view is not only a conscious expression of their ideological preferences, but it also reflects the way in which they understand their life histories in relation to GDR modes of interpreting political events and developments. Their "OKV view on the GDR" therefore does not merely reflect historiography in a strict sense, but personal memory combined with political thought more broadly. It is the way in which they remember their life in the GDR to have been, and which is closely tied to their understanding of past and present politics. In this chapter, I will therefore link my observations on the OKV's memory practices to Glaeser's concept of political epistemics.

[1] David F. Patton, *Out of the East. From PDS to Left Party in Unified Germany* (Albany: SUNY 2011), p. 31.
[2] Patton later applied the term "distinctly Eastern biographies" also to, for instance, academics who became unemployed in the 1990s and who found a new occupation within the PDS-near *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung*. The idea is that one could have been a truck driver in the FRG just as well as in the GDR, whereas one could only have been an MfS employee, or a Professor of Marxism-Leninism, in the GDR.

This first chapter introduces further core concepts of the present thesis, in particular memory, nostalgia, and trauma, and interprets them as community-building emotions. I discuss several theoretical approaches to these phenomena, and by drawing from my fieldwork I argue that the OKV and its member organizations should in the first place be understood as a memory group, a community bound together by shared feelings of longing for a past, or more aptly: by longing to the longings of the past. This does not mean to neglect the political aspects of the OKV activities; rather, I hope to demonstrate that memory and nostalgia are intimately connected to politics.

In my mind, it is not justified to regard the OKV organizations merely as clubs to celebrate the past or long for a re-establishment of the GDR in the future. Memory is not just about the past but very much about the present, and we will see that paradoxically, the self-chosen outsider situation of the OKV in unified Germany has, all idiosyncrasies notwithstanding, a certain integrative function in the new political, social, and legal environment. To be sure, this integration does not entail the OKV being, or even intending to become, "liked" by the German public. Much more, the OKV claims the right to defend its views on history and politics, even if others find these abject. As we shall see throughout this dissertation, the OKV thus uses the protection that a democratic state functioning according to the rule of law offers to defend a state in which such freedom of opinion in fact did not exist.

Communicative memory

In the introduction I followed Martin Sabrow who made a distinction between *Diktaturgedächtnis*, *Arrangementsgedächtnis*, and *Fortschrittsgedächtnis*, as the three types of memory that characterize the German debates on the GDR, and on the Stasi as its security apparatus. This classification is based on the various values assigned to the memory of the GDR, and provides us with three different interpretations of the GDR and of life in the socialist state. In the following I will mostly discuss cases of *Fortschrittsgedächtnis*, which is maintained by those who regard the GDR as a legitimate proponent of justice, solidarity, peace, modernization, and social welfare. But in order to come to terms with this interpretation it is helpful to approach the topic of memory first from a broader perspective, irrespective of the political value attached to the object of remembrance. This memory is individual, rooted in personal experiences and thus in biographies, and at the same time collective, maintained by civil society institutions like the OKV, and by states like the GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany.

Jan Assmann, one of the main theorists in the field of memory studies, describes collective memory (or social memory) as "all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated social practice and intuition."[3] Assmann distinguishes two types of collective memory: cultural memory and communicative memory.

Cultural memory is for Assmann "objectivized culture"; it is that memory which is maintained through "cultural formation and institutional communication". Cultural memory is a consciously selected and promoted set of "texts, images and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image."[4] Cultural memory contributes to the transmission of values that a given society deems important. Efforts to shape cultural memory are always also efforts to reconstruct the past for current political usage.

By contrast, communicative memory is in Assmann's concept different from cultural memory in that it is based on everyday communication. It is characterized by "a high degree of non-specialization, reciprocity of roles, thematic instability and disorganization", and has a limited temporal horizon of 80-100 years.[5] While cultural memory is often defined at state level, where decisions over monuments, commemorations, and history curricula are being made, communicative memory functions at the level of smaller groups. This comes close to what Michael Levine describes as "small social solidarities".[6] This term is applicable to the case of the OKV group in that it not only draws attention to the group's size, but also to its common ties (as a "social solidarity"). According to Assmann, because we all belong to several groups, we all entertain "numerous collective self-images and memories".[7] The various group identities, and related "communicative memories", compete with each other until certain communicative memories become solidified into cultural memory, and will thus be granted the status of (current) "historical truth".

From this perspective, I argue that the OKV is producing "communicative memory", and that the people attached to OKV organizations can thus be framed as a "communicative memory group". This memory group is characterized by a common (collective) self-image

[3] Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity". In: *New German Critique* 65 (1995), pp. 125-133; here p. 126.
[4] Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity" , p. 132.
[5] Ibid., p. 126.
[6] Michael Levine, "Mediated Memories, the Politics of the Past". In: *Analles Philosophici* 1 (2010), pp. 30-50; here p. 30.
[7] Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity", p. 127.

and identity, which is reflected in a body of interconnected memories and shared memory templates.[8] James V. Wertsch makes a distinction between "specific narratives … organized around particular dates, settings, and actions" and "schematic narrative templates [which] are more generalized structures used to generate multiple specific narratives with the same basic plot."[9] I use the term memory template here to indicate that while memory can be very individual, individual memories of group members nevertheless all include a similar master-narrative of GDR history (and also a template for understanding what came after the GDR). It is also clear that the collective memory of the OKV group stands in opposition to the official and mainstream German cultural memory on the GDR.

Given the rather short period that has passed since the fall of the Berlin Wall, cultural memory on the GDR is still very much in the making, and various communicative memory groups with different outlooks on the GDR and life in unified Germany are trying to leave their imprint on collective memory as it takes shape (in the sense of *Diktaturgedächtnis, Arrangementsgedächtnis*, or *Fortschrittsgedächtnis*). There is however a mainstream consensus according to which the GDR was by and large a negative (dictatorial, totalitarian) experience, a state of slowed-down, arrested, or even negative development towards democracy, equality, emancipation, and modernization, even if these were exactly the catch words that the GDR used for its own legitimatization. Mainstream cultural memory of the GDR in unified Germany mostly falls within the category of *Arrangementsgedächtnis,* while the state-sponsored memorialization of the GDR often tends to promote the *Diktaturgedächtnis.*

In the case of the OKV group, the misfit between the memory of the group and its members, on the one hand, and the dominant "objectivized culture" in unified Germany, on the other, leads them to protest against mainstream and official cultural memory (and the history writing which supports it), and to challenge the objectivized culture by producing and popularizing their own history and memory products, in the form of history books, alternative commemorations, struggles for the maintenance of GDR memorial sites, and other activities. Memories, personal biographies, and political commitment are thereby closely interwoven. By viewing the GDR as a legitimate attempt at building a socialist state, OKV members voice

[8] For the importance of shared memories and commemorations in shaping group identities and an illustration of the process of establishing a shared memory in the construction of a collective identity, see also Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Suzanna M. Crage, "Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth." In: *American Sociological Review* 71 (206), pp. 724-751.
[9] James V. Wertsch, "Collective Memory and Narrative Templates". In: *Social Research*, 75(1), pp. 133-156; here p. 140.

their personal attachment to the GDR's "project", in the sense of *Fortschritt* (progress). The political claim that the GDR was a legitimate state, and not an "*Unrechtsstaat*",[10] is at the same time a defence of one's personal righteousness in the past, and provides historical arguments for very tangible demands in the present, including the restoration of privileges that GDR state functionaries once enjoyed.

This linkage between memory and action, in a new situation of being the political underdogs of present German society, is achieved through a constant flow of communication on memory, with the outside world but especially within the community of like-minded people. The memorization of the GDR and the navigation of political and social conditions in reunified Germany are clearly interconnected. This brings me to my argument that memorization in the OKV is closely related to the political epistemics described by Glaeser: it is by forming a cohesive and united communicative memory group that the OKV can defy post-1989 attacks on its vision of politics and life in the GDR.

The historical claims made by the people who form the OKV memory group are often phrased in terms of personal memory. Such personal memories are still readily available and can be selected, adapted, and used for various purposes. As the Hungarian sociologist Éva Kovács has pointed out in her study of how communism is remembered in Hungary, communities that remember communism in fact remember themselves as they lived through the past events; and this personal memory is transforming, through speech and exchange, into collective memory that constitutes communicative memory.[11] Kovács also notes that in communicative memory on communism, a key role is accorded to witnessing.[12] This prominence of the eye-witness can be carried over to organized cultural memory – the core of what, as I argue, constitutes the OKV.

The strength of eye-witness accounts, in society in general but also in the social sciences, comes from their impression of authenticity. The high value accorded to such accounts has led some scholars to warn against the current "memory-craze";[13] as we will see

[10] The term "*Unrechtsstaat*" is widely used in Germany to describe the GDR, including by high-ranking politicians such as former Bundespräsident Roman Herzog (in 1996 in front of the *Enquête-Kommission Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozeß der deutschen Einheit*), and current chancellor Angela Merkel. See "Kanzlerin Merkel rechnet mit DDR als 'Unrechtsstaat' ab". In: *WELT online* (9 May 2009). Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.welt.de/welt_print/article3705724/Kanzlerin-Merkel-rechnet-mit-DDR-als-Unrechtsstaat-ab.html.

[11] Éva Kovács, "The Cynical and the Ironical: Remembering Communism in Hungary". In: *Transit* 30 (2005), pp. 155-169; here p. 155.

[12] Kovács, "The Cynical and the Ironical", p. 156.

[13] See e.g. David Berliner, "Social Thought and Commentary: The Abuses of Memory: Reflections on the Memory Boom in Anthropology", in: *Anthropological Quarterly* 78(1) (2005), pp. 197-211. Note that

below, we should be cautious especially with respect to the malleability of memories, since memories are highly selective and may change over time. Personal memory as the basis for a *partisan* historiography is therefore characterized by selectiveness.[14] When they are regarded as "authentic" and "personal" accounts of past events, memories might not always be held against the same standards as historical texts from the period under consideration. Thus, witnesses are not always scrutinized for their impartiality, and no audience will expect a personal recollection to give a full and balanced account of historical events. This leaves considerable space for memoirists to present themselves as "experts" (by virtue of their first-hand accounts), without having to deal with the professional constraints of specialized history writing.[15] At the same time, a general public is often more impressed, and enraptured, by highly personalized eye-witness accounts than by more general reflections on past events.[16] This popularizing character makes the use of eye-witness accounts so effective for public history purposes, and thus creates building blocks in the formation of cultural memory.

Yet here we return to the beginning of the circle: because of the segmented nature of communicative memory, eye-witness accounts will initially comprise many competing narratives. Before they are integrated into objectivized culture, the credibility of such memories is subject to scrutiny by those who define cultural memory. These are often national governments,[17] who since the rise of the nation-state have come to use the production of a shared memorial culture as a tool of national history-making. In this process, preferred recollections of the past are promoted and made easily accessible, whereas counter-memories,

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professional historians are often skeptical about eye witness accounts, because their personal character makes them inherently biased. Yet at the same time, as Christoph Kleßmann also notes, such accounts are also important sources for historians. Moreover, the professional researcher, as every individual, has a personal bias as well. Christoph Kleßmann, "Erinnerung und Zeitgeschichte. Moralischer Anspruch und wissenschaftliche Aufklärung". In: *Eurozine* (11 March 2005), pp. 1-8; here p. 1.

[14] Such objections to eye-witness accounts as historical authority are described also for current history-writing on post-WWII expellees from former German territories in Germany. Especially in histories on this matter which are supported by the German League of Expellees (*Bund der Vertriebenen*), which uses personal accounts to show the sad and bad situation that these people were in, without reflecting on their earlier Nazi sympathies which caused the anger of the Czech and Polish populations. See Philipp Ther, "The Burden of History and the Trap of Memory", *Tr@nsit online* (2007). Accessed 19 January 2017: http://www.iwm.at/transit/transit-online/the-burden-of-history-and-the-trap-of-memory/.

[15] Obviously, we are here talking about attempts at influencing the historical debate by the OKV memory group itself. That this group uses its experiences to present themselves as experts can be seen from its publications on GDR history, such as Werner Großmann and Wolfgang Schwanitz (eds.), *Fragen an das MfS: Auskünfte über eine Behörde* (3rd revised edition, Berlin: Edition Ost 2010) and Klaus Eichner and Gotthold Schramm (eds.), *Top-Spione im Westen. Spitzenquellen der DDR-Aufklärung erinnern sich* (Berlin: Edition Ost 2008).

[16] See also Ther, "The Burden of History and the Trap of Memory".

[17] In the process of defining cultural memory, governments are naturally influenced by interested scholars, heritage workers (e.g. at monuments) and lay persons (e.g. in the form of eye witnesses, activists, etc.) alike. Historians and heritage workers are often also charged with designing and implementing government plans for the promotion and conservation of cultural memory - and thus have a large imprint on the way this is shaped. The *Enquette Kommissionen* on the GDR (mentioned in the Introduction) illustrate this process very well.

which contest dominant discourses, are muted.[18] This does not imply that such counter-memories disappear, but they remain limited to a smaller group, and are of secondary importance after the dominant national discourse and the official version of national identity.[19] This brings us back to the struggle of communicative memory groups to have their version of memory established as "historical truth". From the above follows that, when power-holders are weak and (historical, political) identities are in flux, counter-cultures might succeed in challenging official culture. If counter-cultures come to dominate the public discourse, they can become official culture. This is what Central Europe witnessed in 1989 with the overturn over the communist political systems.

Yet in contrast to a majority of the East German population, the OKV community is characterized exactly by not changing its worldview. It thus promotes an image of the GDR that is directly linked to how the GDR government sold its own state when it was still there. Accordingly, this OKV memory was "official" (and thus collective memory) before 1989, and was then downgraded to communicative memory. While Assmann asked the question of how one communicative memory (embedded in a memory group) can become cultural memory, the OKV case confronts us with the opposite phenomenon. Ironically, the continuation of GDR-imposed cultural memory within the OKV memory group is both "conservative", namely with regard to GDR official culture, and "revisionist", with regard to the cultural memory that has been dominating since the late 1980s.

Collective re-calling and forgetting

I argue that the defence of the GDR in the OKV communicative memory culture is based on a number of tropes. Recurrent in all expressions of OKV communicative memory are two discursive fields: (1) the historical and political conditions in which the GDR existed, and (2) the social conditions within the GDR. In both of these discursive fields, arguments can be made to legitimize the GDR and to excuse certain of its shortcomings. With these blocks of argumentation, "OKV history", or the OKV members' understanding of the GDR past as

[18] The notion of "counter-memory" was introduced by Foucault. See Michael Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1977). See for a discussion of the use of counter-memory in alternative (or minority) history-writing Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices". In: *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998), pp. 105-140; here pp. 126-127. They warn that "counter-memory approaches often employ a rather essentialist notion of authenticity: Counter-memory is sometimes seen as protected and separate from hegemonic forms" (p. 127).

[19] Olick and Robbins, "Social Memory Studies", p. 127.

embedded in the organizations' communicative memory, follows the patterns of GDR historiography, for already the latter always focused on exactly these two aspects. In the OKV memory group, these two strings of arguments are then woven together in order to present the GDR, including its secret police, as a historical necessity as well as a legitimate attempt at creating a "better Germany". The OKV memory group narrative can therefore be seen as a direct continuation of official GDR history writing and state legitimation. This is also why it is very unlikely that these people would agree with the term "revisionist" – in the sense that they experience their view on history not as a return to, but rather as a continuation of, views which they already held before, and which others have abandoned. No wonder then that several of the persons I interviewed spoke of the events of 1989 as a "counter-revolution", rather than as a revolution or even a "*Wende*".[20] We will come back to this in more detail in chapter two, where I provide an analysis of the specific narrative templates used in autobiographical accounts.

The idea that the GDR was in fact a legitimate and valuable, if failed, attempt at state socialism is used by the OKV organizations for several practical reasons. These concern in the first place the justification of Patton's "distinctly Eastern biographies", or the life trajectories of former GDR functionaries. This vindication of the GDR state project is used to substantiate claims of several OKV organizations in their struggle against FRG pension cuts, as well as for their broader accusation that the FRG has been conducting "victor's justice" (*Siegerjustiz*), especially in the form of professional bans and criminal prosecution. This is for instance how the OKV's biggest member organization, ISOR, frames pensions reductions for erstwhile Stasi officers. In order to delegitimize court procedures against GDR functionaries after 1990, the GRH similarly spoke of *Siegerjustiz*. The same strategy was also used by the SED successor party PDS, and continues to be used by some of the more extreme left platforms within this party (now called *Die Linke*), including the Communist Platform (*Kommunistische Plattform*) and the Marxist Forum (*Marxistische Forum*). This again signals the continued political impact that narratives of the East German past have in Germany.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that the view on history shared by many of the interviewees stems only, or even mainly, from their political concerns. Rather, personal

[20] "1990 was not a *Wende*, that was a counterrevolution! But we don't say that too often, because it puts people off"; interview with Rolf Berthold, 7 November 2012. The term 'counterrevolution' was also used by Siegfried Mechler and Rudolf Denner (interview, 8 November 2012) as well as several others. In a series of interviews with influential veteran communists in the GDR, Catherine Epstein notes the same for Alfred Neumann, but concludes that this was a relatively isolated phenomenon as "most … recognized that the East German population had had legitimate grievances by the fall of 1989." Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries. German Communists and their Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2003), p. 256.

memories have been shaped over time, not only in the GDR but also after its demise. One important factor in the formation of memory is of course the OKV memory group itself, for it foregrounds certain memories and marginalizes others. As Olick and Robbins phrased it, "memory is a process, not a thing, and it works differently at different points in time."[21] Within the OKV environment, the master-narrative described above has been continuously repeated and re-enacted from GDR times onward, with the result that the core pattern is internalized and repeated in almost all individual biographical accounts - as we shall see in chapter 2. This holds true for the selection of recollections that are passed on (what aspects to emphasize when asked by an outsider), and equally for which memories to suppress, consciously or unconsciously, and partially or completely.

There is a whole body of literature on the latter aspect, namely on collective forgetting.[22] As Janet Carsten points out in her anthropological study on Malayan migrants who "forget" their ancestors, such forgetting does not necessarily have to be an "explicit act of disremembering". Instead, "collective forgetting" is often caused by silence over things deemed irrelevant: "Over time, the stories which are not told … are forgotten through the fact that no information about them is transmitted. One cannot forget what one has never known."[23] This obviously goes for future generations to whom stories are either transmitted or not. But is also holds true *within* the existing memory group, as individual members only possess a very small part of the collective memory storage, and therefore rely on their counterparts for additional accounts of what happened, or of "how things were". Carsten points out that such forgetting is, moreover, primarily future-oriented, and should be understood as a social act directed at creating a shared identity: "Pieces of knowledge which are not passed on have a kind of negative significance in that they allow other images of shared identity in the present and future to come to the fore."[24] Thus, similar to recollecting, the act of not sharing stories may be a conscious performance that carries social and political implications.

At the same time, we may assume that many people belonging to the first generation of "conscious forgetters" may still be quite cognisant of that which they choose not to talk about.

[21] Olick and Robbins, "Social Memory Studies", p. 122.
[22] See e.g. Janet Carsten, "The Politics of Forgetting: Migration, Kinship and Memory on the Periphery of the Southeast Asian State". In: *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 1(2) (1995), pp. 317-335; Roland Littlewood, "Neglect as Project: How Two Societies Forget". In: *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15 (2009), pp. 113-130; Charles B. Stone and William Hirst, "(Induced) Forgetting to Form a Collective Memory". In: *Memory Studies* 7(3) (2014), pp. 314-327.
[23] Carsten, "The Politics of Forgetting", p. 330.
[24] Carsten, "The Politics of Forgetting", p. 318.

Some of my respondents also alluded to this themselves, as can be seen in the following quote from the interview with Helmut Holfert where he reflects upon his time working for the Stasi:

> Well, this is how it was. And nevertheless… I would say it like this: For me, this [time in the Stasi] was not a wasted time. I have done much, learned much, kept much [from this time]. Forgot much, as well. Yes. Simply forgot. … Because I wanted to forget this, also. But I never put aside my biography. Right. And I continue to stand for my biography.[25]

Interestingly, Holfert is very explicit about the conscious act of forgetting, while at the same time making a point of having remained true to his personal past. This ties in with another way of not sharing stories I observed within the OKV, in a process which may be best described as "compartmentalized dis-remembering". It appeared that especially stories about *personally experienced* negative aspects of the GDR were indeed not mentioned within the specific setting of the OKV. Yet this did not mean that they were taboo when OKV activists met in more private settings. The crucial issue here is that the setting in which these issues could be discussed were regarded as safe places where the political legitimation of the GDR would not be challenged by openness about personal misfortunes in that state. "Compartmentalized forgetting" thus differs from "selective forgetting" in that a particular episode or event is not silenced completely, but *in a specific context* only.

One case in point occurred during an interview with a group of five mutual friends whom I met through the OKV's former chairman and his wife, and who were all OKV sympathizers.[26] In this setting contacts with the GDR State Security Service ("Stasi", MfS) were initially not a topic. In fact, when I asked them about such contacts, I was first told that current historiography on the GDR puts too much stress on the Stasi, and that they hoped to convey a more favourable impression of the GDR by telling me their life stories. It was thus obvious that my interviewees were aware of the political dimension of their private recollections, which they shared with the obvious goal to vindicate the GDR. Initially, four out of my five interview partners could not recall that they had any personal contacts with the Stasi, and suggested that the GDR's secret service had played no intrusive role in their lives at all. The conversation then went on to touch on other topics, including the interviewees' career trajectories. It was in this context that Alexandra Welsch, who had been a tour group leader in the GDR and who was throughout the interview the most critical of life in the former state, came up with a detailed account of several Stasi attempts to recruit her as an informant. And

[25] Interview with Helmut Holfert, 10 July 2012.
[26] Collective interview with Gertrud Fischer and friends, 12 July 2012.

once this story had been shared, in a light and almost anecdotic fashion,[27] others also started to recall personal experiences with the Stasi, and contacts that they did have. Some of these were pretty marginal, like stories about strangers – obviously from the state security – who stopped by to inquire about the behaviour of neighbours. At this point, one of the participants in this group interview, Hildegard Müller, brought back (and into the discussion) the memory of how she once planned to marry a man working for the criminal investigation department [*Kriminalpolizei*], a police unit close to the MfS. Her then-fiancé had to ask the security ministry for permission to marry her, but his request was turned down, because as an employee of the GDR's secret services he was not supposed to keep close contacts to a woman with "west-contacts":

> So (*Also*), I was in the party, and actually, I was also always in favour of all [policies, developments] and so forth. But I do have to say, where I really suffered much (*ganz doll gelitten habe*) [was the following incident]… My husband was dead for many years. [Then] I met someone who worked for the criminal investigation police (*Kriminalpolizei*). And I have a brother in Canada… And we tried all we could. We split up, and then we tried again, and I wrote [to the authorities], I officially mentioned that [I had a brother in Canada]… *Ach*, and then I had to write down all other West-contacts that I had…. And I did all that, because we wanted to file another request [to marry]. And then he [my fiancé] came back, [and said to me:] well, you did not mention one [*du hast eine unterschlagen*]… Your sister-in-law visited the funeral of your husband… I did not have any contact with her. But still this was… [interpreted as a token that] I have something to hide. So… And additionally, I have a brother in Canada. And I wrote [and promised] that I would also separate from my brother, we didn't have any contact [anyways], and so… No, you cannot go on this [promise], we have to separate. … Well, to me, that was worse than my first divorce. It was not allowed to be... And those were the things that I really suffered from. And then I thought, well, you were in the party and [still] you were not… trustworthy? After so and so many years… I even received a [honorary] document from Honecker… But you cannot meet a man, because… And [he was] even a GDR citizen! That makes you scratch your head! No, that… So there were really… bad things, I should say. But still I was… [breaks off] [28]

While this event clearly had a strong impact on her life, and she was visibly still disturbed by the occasion, Hildegard Müller only related this story once the issue of Stasi intrusion in her relation was brought up by others. This suggests that she generally prefers to remain silent about this episode when talking about her memories of life in the GDR.

[27] The story included an apparently unsuccessful attempt to seduce her by sending 'good-looking men' to the young Alexandra. As one of the few people I interviewed that were very critical of the Stasi, she insisted she had always refused to work with the secret service - even if this meant that she would never be selected to guide tours abroad. Collective interview with the friends of Gertrud Fischer, 12 July 2012.

[28] Hildegard Müller, in: Collective interview with the friends of Gertrud Fischer, 12 July 2012.

There were similar cases in which negative experiences only came up in contexts that were apparently understood to be "un-political". Both former OKV chair Siegfried Mechler and his wife Margitta Mechler are very involved with the OKV. I had several conversations with both Siegfried and Margitta, separately and together. In these conversations they insisted that the GDR had been a good state, frequently pointing at its social merits.[29] Yet the life story of the Mechlers involved raising a disabled child, for which they did not receive any support from the state; and Margitta recounted how exactly during that period her husband was fired from university for having written a dissertation on a topic that had gone out of favour. Despite the influence that these experiences must have had on Margitta's life, she only talked about the obvious hardships this involved when we were sitting in a pub and having a conversation that was not on [her] "life in the GDR", and thus on political legitimacy, but on the issue of motherhood and raising small children.

In both cases described above, we see that the memories initially left untold still exist. These are not "blocked memories" that the holder has no access to anymore. They are also not necessarily rendered silent in every context. Rather, these memories are still active, and they are indeed activated and shared on multiple occasions. This is clear from the fact that all the friends of Hildegard Müller knew the story of her fiancé, although the friendship of this circle had formed only after the fall of the GDR, meaning her friends had not experienced the event first-hand. But they must have talked about this episode in Hildegard's life before. Similarly, the daughter of the Mechlers regularly attends OKV meetings and is thus known to most core OKV members. But what is striking is that both memories were brought up in somehow "non-political" contexts: in one case, in a pub conversation about raising children, and, in the other, at the end of a four-hour interview with a group of five friends relating their life stories. Notably, these negative experiences – which must have had a strong emotional impact on their bearers – were not, in the mind of these women, reasons to discredit the GDR. This seems paradoxical: these stories, which are very personal and involve both strong emotions of love (for the child and the fiancé) and helplessness vis-à-vis the state (which fails to arrange basic care and refuses to allow a marriage) could easily be translated into a critique of the general political situation in the GDR. Yet the women who told these stories apparently did not hold them against the GDR as a political project. It seems that they did so by rendering these stories "un-political" through interpreting them through the lens of personal histories

[29] Apart from interviews with Margitta Mechler (13 June 2012) and Siegfried Mechler (12 July 2012; 8 November 2012), I had several conversations with both of them during my research trips to Berlin, including at OKV events and during more informal meetings at their dacha (or *Kleingarten*) and in the pub (28 November 2013).

(relationships, motherhood) that are connected to individual fate in life rather than to the political system in which this fate played out. This is in obvious contradistinction to the way in which my interlocutors generally presented their life in East Germany, namely as a genuinely positive individual experience that they claimed was shared by the overall population.

Moreover, they only employed this strategy in the case of the GDR – of which they want to keep fond memories. In the case of the FRG, on the other hand, a reverse strategy seems to be used: negative personal experiences are interpreted politically, while positive experiences in unified Germany are seen as individual exceptions not connected to the new political system. Hence Wolfgang Schmidt could complain about the "political courts" in "the FRG" which are installing "victor's justice" (*Siegerjustiz*) in general, while at the same time conceding that he was happy that the judge ruling in his favor had in fact been "really independent."[30]

Strikingly, the well-known controversial aspects of GDR history are not avoided in conversations with OKV members or friends. Features and events that in German public discourse are commonly understood as signs of the GDR's injustice and failure (most prominently the brutal repression of the June 1953 workers' uprising, the Berlin Wall, Stasi repression, the dire state of the GDR's economy and industry, and Honecker's unwillingness to reform) were in fact mentioned over and over again – in order to explain their causes or necessities. We might even assume that the OKV members' preoccupation with exactly these topics contributes to their failure to find support outside their own established group – by making themselves utterly unattractive to "unpolitical" nostalgics, that is, former GDR citizens who are nostalgic about their youth in the GDR but not about the political system in which they grew up. It can be concluded that the urge to talk about these events is in fact linked to their overtly political nature, and to the fact that they cannot be evaded when trying to justify the past. What is avoided is a more emotional tone. Cases of injustice are presented as the unfortunate but necessary by-product of a legitimate pursuit of (state) interests – a common justification strategy within the OKV:

> And… I have to go back to the 18th of August of '61 once more. There were some people who cheered about this [the building of the Berlin wall], well… I did not do that. But…[I] accepted this military safeguarding of the state border as a bitter necessity. And then, when there were citizens who thought about finding their fortune in the west and who wanted to leave the GDR illegally by crossing the state border, and thereby [in

[30] Interview with Wolfgang Schmidt, 12 June 2012.

> their attempt to get to West Germany] came to death… Officially [there were] 136 [deaths], in these 28 years… then I never considered that with… *Schadenfreude*, or [as a good thing]… but I always felt this was a negative [event] for the GDR. Although [only] in the rarest cases, there was a serious political or economic reason for this flight. They wanted a better… they wanted to get things they did not have here (*die wollten an Dinge ran die sie bei uns nicht so hatten*). And then they flippantly put their lives at risk (*dann haben sie leichtfertig ihr Leben aufs Spiel gesetzt*).[31]

Obviously, this argument only holds water when you accept that it was legitimate for the GDR to keep its citizens hostage. Its use is therefore an example of how the OKV justifies the GDR through the framework of that same state – that is, by holding on to its political ideology.

Nostalgia

Memory and nostalgia are closely related concepts, but they do not always refer to the same thing. Whereas memory is a more "neutral" term, referring to all recollections of the past, nostalgia means specifically "a longing for the past" that is based on such memories. Dominic Boyer, in his study of *Ostalgie*, traces the notion of nostalgia (a composition of the Greek *nostos*, "homecoming", and *algos*, meaning pain or ache) back to the 17th century, when it was first used to describe what we would now call homesickness amongst Swiss soldiers. Here dislocation from one's social ecology is central. It is from this common dislocation that the term was later attached to being away not from one's geographical home, but rather from one's *past*.[32] Many scholars agree that this desire to be in the past is not so much a desire for the past as it really was, but rather a "longing for longing"; or a desire for those things that were desired, and whose outcomes were still open in the past.[33] Nostalgia can thus be seen as "a mourning over the loss of alternative futures", as Svetlana Boym formulated it in her famous monograph on *The Future of Nostalgia*.[34]

Nostalgia as a "longing for past longing" is thus essentially past-oriented. It is precisely because the past is irretrievably gone that the longings of the past can be remembered without

[31] Interview with Siegfried Mechler, 12 July 2012. Many of the respondents made similar statements.
[32] Dominic Boyer, "*Ostalgie* and the Politics of the Future in Eastern Germany". In: *Public Culture* 18(2) (2006), pp. 361-381; esp. 365-366; 368.
[33] Maya Nadkarni and Olga Shevchenko, "The Politics of Nostalgia: A Case for Comparative Analysis of Post-Socialist Practices". In: *Ab Imperio* 2(2004), pp. 487-519; here p. 491.
[34] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books 2001), p. xvi.

taking into account its downsides – thereby obscuring the source of longing in the past itself.[35]

Trauma

Peter Fritzsche points out that nostalgia reflects feelings of cultural stress, of inability to make oneself at home in a constantly changing world. As such, nostalgia is specifically felt by the "victims of cultural change", rather than by its beneficiaries. In the period of the French Revolution, nostalgia was especially prevalent amongst émigrés who lost their privileges and properties through the events:

> The imagination of exile was composed by a painful process of relocation, in which émigrés both indulged in memories of the securities of the past (when they stood in the center) and reported on the uncertainties of the[ir] (marginalized) future. History was experienced by them as a disaster that had left them homeless. At the same time, their experience was rendered in highly personalized terms, which served to emphasize real distress and to denote the particular, individual effects of general historical forces. This imbrication of the personal and the public is a key aspect to nostalgia – the general narrative is needed to place individual experiences in a greater story with historical poignancy.[36]

The attachment of personal stories to a grand narrative that explains and evaluates historical changes fits the way in which OKV members craft their personal histories as exemplary of the three German states they lived in, and the (political) changes these states went through.

Fritzsche's description indeed comes very close to the narratives represented by the persons I interviewed. Personal memories of upward social mobility in the GDR are often accompanied by contemplations of social securities under state socialism (especially regarding education, work and kindergarten places). Such securities were then positively compared to the present situation, which, according to the interviewed, abounds with uncertainties.

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[35] See e.g. Peter Fritzsche, "Specters of History: On Nostalgia, Exile and Modernity". In: *The American Historical Review* 106(5) (2001), pp. 1587-1618; Gerald W. Creed, "Strange Bedfellows: Socialist Nostalgia and Neoliberalism in Bulgaria". In: Maria Todorova and Zsusza Gille (eds.), *Post-Communist Nostalgia* (New York: Berghahn Books 2010), pp. 29-45; David Lowenthal, "Nostalgia Tells It Like It Wasn't". In: M. Chase and C. Shaw (eds.), *The Imaginary Past: History and Nostalagia* (Manchester 1989), pp. 18-32.

[36] Fritzsche, "Specters of History", p. 1605.

Remarkably, when discussing such uncertainties of our time, most of the interviewed did in fact not point to their own current personal situation. In some cases, they pointed to their own personalities *in the past*:

> In the time I raised my three children alone, I did not have to worry. Kindergarten, the school, childcare after school (the *Hort*). They [his children] were taken care of throughout the day (in *Ganztagsbetreuung*), free of charge. … [A]nd when the *Wende* came, this social security was over with a blow.[37]

Although the amount of available day care indeed declined in east Germany after unification, this was obviously not a direct problem for OKV members themselves – who did not raise kids in the 1990s. In other cases, they pointed to the experiences and difficulties of *acquaintances*, such as the children of friends:

> My friend's son who graduated as an engineer, sent out some 95 application letters after graduation. But he hardly ever found a job. Now whoever is willing to take him on, can do with him whatever he wants. He has lost his spine, and [therefore] accepts every order he gets from his superior.[38]

In yet other cases, they referred to *abstract persons*: "Nowadays, young women could not make a career like that anymore".[39]

The reasons for not bringing up their own experiences of insecurity to bolster their claims about the bad state of unified Germany might well lie in the elderly age of my interview partners. Because a large majority of the interviewed had already retired when I spoke with them, they no longer actively partook in the education and work processes which they all viewed as central to (upward or downward) social mobility. Their children had long left the house. Stories reflecting on their own social decline, most often related to unemployment and enforced early retirement, usually stem from the early- to mid-1990s. Although the loss of jobs still remains a painful memory for many, and might well be an important source of their continuing dissatisfaction with the unified German state, my interlocutors appeared to understand that these individual stories from twenty years ago had lost force, or that the position of the story-teller was too marginal for the story to carry a wider relevance. Therefore, other peoples' stories were added as personalized accounts of ostensibly bigger injustices that the state of unified Germany inflicts upon its citizens. It thus appears

[37] "[U]nd diese soziale Absicherung war mit der Wende mit einen Schlag vorbei." Gunther Klein, in: Collective Interview with friends of Gertrud Fischer, 12 July 2012.
[38] Interview with Siegfried Mecher, 12 July 2012.
[39] Interview with Margitta Mechler and Gertrud Fischer, 13 June 2012.

that typified tropes about the "good past" and the "bad present" (since the 1990s) are usually conveyed though personalized memories; and at the same time these personal memories are understood to be so general that they can easily be replaced by stories of others, who serve as a "memory by proxy".

At the same time, the degree to which history was "felt as a disaster that had left them homeless"[40] differed from person to person. It seems that whether people did or did not have a job after 1990 played a big role in this feeling. Thus Klaus Wons, who lost his job as program director of the *Palast der Republik* when the latter was closed down in 1990, still views his period of employment at the palace as "the most beautiful time of [his] life".[41] Siegfried Mechler, who worked as professor at the Humboldt University and went into early retirement in the early 1990s, recalled his university career and then said: "Then came the West, and I became a nobody."[42] The same goes for those interviewed who had lost their job not for political reasons, but as a result of the general crisis of transition: After having worked in GDR times as a teacher and later as a cashier, Hildegard Müller also became unemployed after the *Wende*. Her recollection of her dismissal and the period that followed vividly shows her distress over the loss of meaning and social contacts associated with her job:

> And then the [GDR trade] union was dissolved, and I was … on the street. And there my life came to an end. I was then… at that time, I already lived here [in this neighborhood]. My husband had taken his life, so that I was alone … [I] remained [so] until today, and… Actually, just here, [I] was again included in this circle [of friends] … Apart from this I … actually … had no function anymore, at my age. After the *Wende*.[43]

Here it might be useful to point to the work of Gerald Creed, who argues that nostalgia should be taken more serious as a psychological condition.[44] Creed, who conducted fieldwork in a Bulgarian village at several periods both before and after the fall of communism, concluded that "many villagers who were 'nostalgic' were in fact working their way out of … a psychological condition tantamount to a sickness." He furthermore argues that "the socioeconomic disruptions villagers lived through certainly qualify as 'social trauma'."[45] It is

[40] Fritzsche, "Specters of History: On Nostalgia, Exile and Modernity", p. 1605.
[41] Double interview with Rudolf Denner and Klaus Wons, 10 July 2012.
[42] Interview with Siegfried Mechler, 12 July 2012.
[43] Hildegard Müller in collective interview with the friends of Gertrud Fischer, 12 July 2012. Although Hildegard Müller had also stopped working on her own account for a period of several years before 1989, she here refers specifically to the point in time where she lost her last job due to the changed situation after 1989 with the prospect of becoming permanently unemployed.
[44] Creed, "Strange Bedfellows", pp. 29-45.
[45] Creed, "Strange Bedfellows", p 34.

naturally impossible to establish the psychological condition of the interviewed, and I am convinced that most of them were not in a state of severe trauma in the recent years when I spoke with them. Yet, some people related stories that point to some truth in Creed's statements. Gunther Klein recalled how he withdrew from public life after he was forced into early retirement following German unification. Before 1990, he had worked in the Culture section of the Berlin magistrate:

> And like I said, the *Wende* came, and it was all over. *Feierabend*. For a short while I worked in a bookshop through one of these employment measures ("*Maßnahmen*"). But actually, I was disgruntled (*sauer*). And for two years I almost completely retreated [from social life], because I could no longer cope with all the problems. My first [social] encounter again, next to the normal saying hello, was that I started to go to the monthly *Skat*-evenings.[46] This way I slowly but surely got into contact with others.[47]

Similar despair is reflected in the case of Brigitta Wegerer, who voluntarily gave up her job and went into early retirement in the mid-1990s in order to "save her marriage": Her husband, who had been a foreign trader for the GDR, could not cope with the new situation, which had left him jobless and simultaneously robbed him of his status as (main) breadwinner.[48]

The feeling of homelessness, or internal exile, was reflected upon in less dramatic terms by other people I spoke with. For instance, Margitta Mechler and Gertrud Fischer both stated that they had "never arrived in the new Germany",[49] their choice of words evoking the image of a spatial gap that they had not managed to leap over. When watching a European Championship soccer match at a public location, Dieter Feuerstein, who himself in fact had been an FRG citizen also before 1990, showed his disapproval of all the people in the audience who displayed German flags, and claimed that "this will never be my flag".[50]

Yet as Maya Nadkarni and Olga Shevchenko point out in relation to post-socialist nostalgia, such narratives should not always be taken at face value, since this sense of alienation "in itself … can be thought of as part and parcel of the nostalgia industry."[51] And in a sense, the OKV is part of this nostalgia-producing business: it is by performing alienation from the FRG that OKV members show their lasting commitment to the GDR. An illustration

[46] *Skat* is a popular cards game.
[47] Gunther Klein in collective interview with the friends of Gertrud Fischer, 12 July 2012.
[48] Collective interview with friends of Gertrud Fischer, 12 July 2012.
[49] Interview with Margitta Mechler and Gertrud Fischer, 13 June 2012.
[50] Interview with Dieter Feuerstein, 13 June 2012.
[51] Nadkarni and Shevchenko, "The Politics of Nostalgia", pp. 487-519.

of this discrepancy between narrative and reality can be found in the conversations with Margitta Mechler and Gertrud Fischer. While their narratives, following the patterns of OKV identity, convey the impression that they live in near-complete isolation, both ladies turned out to be very active volunteers in their neighbourhood: amongst other things, Margitta Mechler is the chair of the local association for disabled persons, and Gertrud Fischer volunteers as an assistant to children with reading difficulties at a local school.[52] This shows that they in fact actively participate in society to a much greater extent than they suggest when they frame their memories through the nostalgia paradigm. It also shows how at least part of the (nostalgic) sentiments expressed might reflect a pattern that the interviewees feel they should adhere to, rather than their actual situation. This suggests that OKV members use a paradigm that does not always correspond to their realities, and that the "communicative memory" discourse in the OKV to some extent limits their expression. The same can be said for situations where interviewees neglect certain negative experiences (such as in the case of the Stasi influence on the life of Hildegard Müller), or when interviewees downplay negative experiences that might otherwise contradict their positive view on the GDR.

Nostalgia as a coping strategy

This raises the question as to what functions nostalgic narratives actually fulfill in coping not only with the past, but especially with the present. Recent studies in psychology show that experiencing nostalgia may actually have several positive effects on its bearer. Nostalgia has been described as a "meaning-making resource" that makes people think about positive life experiences and helps them "navigate meaning-threatening experiences".[53] In providing meaning to a life as it was conducted, nostalgia reduces the pressure to search for new meaning in the present – suggesting that it has an overall effect on its bearers' feelings of (personal) relevance.[54] This is of obvious importance to people whose sense of purpose and fulfillment had been so bound up with the ideology and goals of a now bygone state.[55]

[52] Interview with Margitta Mechler and Gertrud Fischer, 13 June 2012.
[53] Clay Routledge et al., "The Power of the Past: Nostalgia as a Meaning-Making Resource". In: *Memory* 20:5 (2012), pp. 452-460; here p. 458.
[54] Routledge et al., "The Power of the Past", p. 455.
[55] In his study of Soviet diaries under Stalinism, Jochen Hellbeck observes that "[t]he belief that one's thoughts and actions had historical relevance provided meaning" was one of the most significant rewards offered by Soviet ideology, and was in fact so appealing that many people did come to structure their lives around Soviet ideology even in the oppressive climate of Stalinism. Hellbeck, *Revolution On My Mind. Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 352.

It should be noted that nostalgia narratives have a more complex structure than only focusing on positive remembering; rather, nostalgia is usually understood as a "bittersweet emotion". But while negative experiences do have a place in nostalgic recollections, positive experiences are prevalent.[56] While nostalgia narratives thus allow for a recognition of sorrow in the past, such experiences are safely encapsulated in a broader, overall positive narrative. Through structuring and providing meaning to life stories, nostalgia furthermore enhances positive self-esteem[57] and helps people to maintain identity continuity in times of change.[58] An increased sense of meaning moreover reduces boredom.[59] This is not unimportant to note: several of the more active OKV members admitted that their activities with and for the association fulfilled an important function as occupational therapy or, more simply put, a reason to get out of bed in the morning. Similarly, former general commander of the Berlin border troops Günter Leo, who was sentenced to prison for his GDR activities and who is now active in several OKV-related organizations, admitted that he "enjoyed" his activities for these organizations, and that they provided him as well as other activists with a sense of "fulfillment and self-affirmation".[60] Needless to say, also the maintenance of ideological positions from GDR times provides stability in life, by offering a solid explanatory model for understanding the world in which the nostalgic participated, or still participates, in a historic mission.

And although nostalgia often seems to be triggered by a sense of loneliness, it simultaneously promotes social connectedness.[61] This is an important outcome of nostalgia, as social connectedness in turn helps people to find social support – which to many of its members is a central feature of the OKV. Coping strategies that correlate with nostalgia include seeking advice or assistance from others (instrumental social support) and looking for moral support, sympathy or understanding (emotional social support).[62] As we will see throughout this dissertation, the OKV network supplies both these support functions to many of its active members. Other useful coping strategies identified by psychologists include expressing emotions (venting), finding comfort in religion, looking for distraction, thinking

[56] Tim Wildschut et al., "Nostalgia: Content, Triggers, Functions". In: *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 91 (2006), pp. 975-993.
[57] Routledge et al., "The Power of the Past", p. 453.
[58] Krystine Irene Batcho, "Nostalgia: Retreat or Support in Difficult Times?" In: *The American Journal of Psychology* 126(3) (2013), pp. 355-367; here p. 356.
[59] Wijnand A.P. Van Tilburg, E.R. Igou, & C. Sedikides. "In Search of Meaningfulness: Using Nostalgia as an Antidote to Boredom". In: *Emotion* 13 (2013), pp. 450-461.
[60] Interview with Günter Leo, 12 December 2013.
[61] Tim Wildschut et al. "Nostalgia as a Repository of Social Connectedness: The Role of Attachment-Related Avoidance". In: *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 98 (2010), pp. 573-586.
[62] Batcho, "Nostalgia: Retreat or Support in Difficult Times?", p. 357.

about how to handle a given problem (planning), and construing the problem in positive terms (growth).[63] Negative coping strategies on the other hand include denial of the problem or avoiding to deal with it (behavioral disengagement), in addition to substance abuse.[64] As is clear from the story of Gunther Klein quoted above, these reactions were also present directly after 1989 – and in fact, several informants pointed out the importance of the OKV as a support network especially in these early years when some friends and colleagues became depressed or alcoholic.[65]

Claiming "trauma"

The notion that people who were knee-deep involved in a repressive regime might suffer from trauma is controversial. In *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*, Aleida Assmann strongly argues against the use of the term trauma to denote the experiences of Nazi perpetrators:

> Although it is still common practice to speak of a trauma of both perpetrators and victims, I want to decidedly plea for only using the concept of trauma for specific forms of victim experiences. In contrast to victims, perpetrators are not traumatized, because they have willingly, in a calculated manner, and consciously carried out the event for which they are now called to account and – in the case of Nazi crimes – on top of that they ideologically justified this [crime] for themselves. [66]

While conceding that all human beings are entitled to their own memories, Aleida Assmann argues that the term "trauma" should be used only when describing the state of the victims, not that of the perpetrators. This is essentially a moral position against the psychological approach to trauma reviewed above. Yet Assmann is here specifically referring to persons/perpetrators who see their crimes being exposed, and whose state cannot be a trauma in her opinion.[67] Her argument is heavily based on (West-)German discourses from the first decades after Nazi defeat – and Assmann is convinced that these perpetrators were actually aware of the criminal character of their activities (which they "justified for themselves" rather than understood as being just).

[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Interview with Wolfgang Schmidt, 12 June 2012; Collective interview with friends of Gertrud Fischer, 12 July 2012.
[66] Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Gechichtspolitik* (München: C.H. Beck 2006), p. 96. Translation mine.
[67] Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*, p. 97.

A few words may be in order here on the lopsided equation of the Nazi and GDR pasts in Germany that one encounters among some authors who adhere to the *Diktaturgedächtnis*. It is obvious that the Stasi committed many crimes, and that the GDR produced perpetrators also in the sense that Aleida Assmann referred to. It should however first be mentioned that not all OKV activists were Stasi co-workers; and some of my interview partners confessed that they had initially been uncomfortable with being associated with former Stasi officers. It was only after 1990 that they joined this group, and relations solidified through common contacts in the OKV.[68]

Secondly, I doubt that many of the former Stasi members active in the OKV were indeed aware of the criminal nature of their activities. In fact, from their statements it seems that they are still convinced of, if not the legality, then at least the necessity, of their actions. And thirdly, we should keep in mind that the GDR's secret service was in large part a bureaucracy. Most Stasi officers, as well as indeed most people upholding the SED regime in other functions (including even the NVA), were not directly involved in acts of physical violence. With this, I do not wish to dispute the repressive nature of the SED regime. The point is to clearly distinguish the GDR's more subtle methods of surveillance and manipulation, accompanied by targeted, often psychological, repression, from the Nazis' massive physical annihilation of people. It thus seems that the possible traumas that former Stasi officers describe for themselves are not linked to direct acts of violence they committed in the past, or to any specific activities that might now be "disclosed"; rather, their trauma, if we can use this term, is from the shock of suddenly living in a new world order altogether, and certainly more metaphorical in most cases. Theirs is thus a rather different trauma from that which Aleida Assmann has in mind when talking about Nazi victims and perpetrators. That Stasi victims can suffer from traumas is beyond doubt.

Not surprising is in any case the rather unreflective way in which former perpetrators confront their past by looking to justify their erstwhile activities through clinging on to old worldviews. Yet in the end, this is not enough: for self-justification to function properly, such arguments should not "suffer" too much from the constant de-valuation brought close to them in wider society. Thus, former GDR cadres implicated in activities that are now widely

[68] Conversation with Margitta Mechler, 28 November 2013. The issue of joining the OKV was also a subject of discussion within the *Friedensglockengesellschaft*, with some members arguing against association with a group commonly known as a 'Stasi-clique' (conversation with Bernd Mewes, 6 Augustus 2013).

regarded as crimes also need to convince *others* of the justness of their actions.[69] The most common justification strategy in the OKV is the attempt to convince others of their ideological position.

In *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*, Aleida Assmann has identified several justification strategies that were prevalent amongst Germans after the defeat of Nazism. These include admitting guilt but trying to find justification in "compensation" ("we also did a lot of good"); shifting blame ("the 'real' perpetrator was the system / leader / etc."); filtering (focusing on the good while neglecting the bad); claiming naiveté ("I was unaware of the consequences of my behavior", "I didn't know better", etc.); silencing the past; or minimalizing activities ("this was not so bad" or "this was a bad act, but it did not happen often").[70]

Noticeably, I found that OKV activists use only some of these strategies, in particular compensation (by pointing out the antifascist doctrine and the social merits of the GDR) and filtering. To this, we may add silencing the past, inasmuch as this is an aspect of filtering. Thus, none of the people interviewed started discussing the Stasi's mechanism of control by themselves. Although some of the respondents classified the Stasi's attempt to maintain maximum control as "exaggerated" (*überspitztes Sicherheitsdenken*[71]), they still refrained from discussing these mechanisms of control in detail, preferring instead to continue their discussion of the GDR's merits. Yet the other strategies mentioned above (shifting blame,[72] claiming naiveté and minimalizing activities) are conspicuously absent from OKV activists' repertoire of justification, in conversations and in texts. Instead, the OKV continues to exonerate many of the aspects of the GDR that are generally despised, often by refusing to acknowledge that they were problematic at all. The justification of the Berlin Wall, which is commonly defended as having been necessary to avoid an exodus of GDR-trained specialists,

[69] Article 103 of the German basic law prohibits the introduction of *ex post facto* law. However, judges may resort to the Radbruch Formula (*Radbruchsche Formel*), that was formulated in 1946 in the context of litigation about Nazi crimes, stipulating that a judge may decide against applying the statute of the law if this seems either "unbearably unjust" or in "deliberate disregard" of human equality before the law. Although this did in fact happen in the *Mauerschützen-Prozesse*, caution of applying *ex post facto* law means that very few former GDR functionaries were actually prosecuted after 1990. One of the OKV member organizations, the Society for Juridical and Humanitarian Support (*Gesellschaft zur rechtlichen und humanitären Unterstützung*, GRH, with an estimated membership of 1.100) was created as a support group for these persons. Bundesgerichtshof, Urteil vom 20. März 1995 – 5 StR 111/94 (Abschnitt D. II. 3. a) aa)), BGHSt 41, 10.

[70] Assmann, "Fünf Strategien der Verdrängung", in her *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*, pp. 169-182. Obviously, filtering also includes a specific form of silencing.

[71] Interview with Helmut Holfert, 10 July 2012.

[72] The above quote on the Berlin Wall (p. 42-43) shows that OKV members blame the deaths at the GDR-FRG border on the victims. Yet instead of shifting blame, I argue that this is rather a strategy of *denying* blame (because they do not accept that shooting at the border was wrong in itself).

is a good example. The quotation above on people shot when attempting to cross the border also shows how respondents continue to put the blame for persecution on the victims, and not on the state. The following excerpt of my interview with Gertrud Fischer and her friends reveals how they chose to uncritically accept the presence of the Stasi, and how they, despite their own experiences to the contrary, remain convinced that one was not targeted as long as one "had nothing to hide":

Gunther Klein: Yes, the Stasi was very big. But nowadays, there are many big intelligence agencies as well. The FRG has three of them! And this must be more than the Stasi had. And you can see for yourself now, with this [neonazi] cell from Zwickau,[73] that all [agencies] work for themselves, but not together… not at all. Instead, they compete…

AB: But don't you think that there is a difference between now, when intelligence agencies might not be doing all that they could, and the case of the Stasi, which did much too much?

Hildegard Müller: But the *Staatssicherheit* did not do that, they did not even look at harmless people, because they never even had the technology for that. We said [to each other], *Mensch*, there was a creaking sound in the [telephone] line again, there must have been someone listening in [on us]. Or when we had talked [with each other], we said, well… that was smart of us again. But in the end… we never really believed in this [pervasiveness of Stasi control]. Because I… we were not so important. Because we were really harmless.

AB: [Referring to an earlier point in the conversation, where Hildegard Müller told how her son went to see his personal file with intelligence the Stasi gathered about him after the archives were opened]. Okay. But then why should your son have a file?

Gertrud Fischer: Well, I certainly should have one too. My oldest son also has one, but he said [after the files were opened], "I am not interested in that".

[73] Klein refers here to a group of three neo-Nazis who became known in Germany as the "Brown cell of Zwickau". Together, they were responsible for 10 murders, including killing one police officer and nine immigrants, 8 of Turkish and 1 of Greek origin, which became known as the "Döner murders". They were also responsible for several bomb attacks in Cologne and Nuremberg. After the death of Uwe Mundlos and Uwe Böhnhardt and the arrest of Beate Zschäpe, it became public that they had already been subject of investigation by the Thuringian state security in 1997. In 1998, they had apparently disappeared from the radar, yet investigations into their network of supporters raised suspicions that this included several people who were simultaneously working for security agencies as "undercover investigators". This revelation spurred a debate about the German state security; specifically on whether it had a 'blind spot' for neo-Nazist extremism.

Alexandra Welsch: I should also have a file, because of that guy from [the West German city of] Nuremberg whom I dated...

AB: But none of you were dangerous to the state, right?

Brigitta Wegerer: Well, that was just the mechanism.[74]

This conversation is all the more interesting when we take into account that these statements were made only shortly after the friends' discussion of Stasi involvement in the marriage plans of Hildegard Müller. The continued belief that they were not of interest to the Stasi because they were *harmless* at the same time shows their continued acceptance of the Stasi's, or at least the GDR's, definition of what, and especially who, were apparently "harmful". At the same time, when it appeared that the Stasi did in fact keep files on several of them, this was simply accepted as the "mechanism", which was left unquestioned. The desire not to be confronted with these Stasi files moreover betrays the interviewees' reluctance to consider any information that would question their image of the Stasi as an organization that was harmless to "harmless citizens". And another important aspect of justification that one sees in this example is the comparative perspective: flaws of the GDR system are admitted, but immediately offset by comparing them with the ostensibly bigger problems of the FRG. All this again attests to the OKV's continuing commitment to the GDR's worldview and narratives – which brings us to the issue of the entanglement of nostalgia with politics.

Nostalgia and politics

The notion of nostalgia as a sentiment directed towards a past that has irrevocably gone has led some to suggest that nostalgia helps depoliticize experiences of the past. Nostalgia itself might be mostly felt by people dissatisfied with current conditions. Yet when we set their grievances aside as "nostalgic", by thus suggesting that these people still live in a past long caught-up by the pace of history, we might be tempted to ignore the political side of their feelings.[75] In the case of the OKV, this can be seen in the common assumption that the people who relate to the OKV view on history are simply the *Ewiggestrigen*, "those who forever live

[74] Collective interview with friends of Gertrud Fischer, 12 July 2012.
[75] Creed, "Strange Bedfellows", p. 33.

in the past" (literally: "perpetual yesteryears").[76] This disempowering aspect of the notion of nostalgia also explains why those affected with nostalgia after political upheavals hardly ever use the term nostalgia themselves. As Maria Todorova points out in her introduction to a book on post-communist nostalgia in Eastern Europe, nostalgia is an *ascriptive* term.[77]

Yet the term nostalgia may express different sentiments. Here we should probably make a distinction between politically oriented nostalgia and nostalgia that does not grow out of political displacement or dissatisfaction, but is rather oriented towards earlier life phases. This latter "nostalgia for youth" appears to be quite common, and is also recognized as nostalgia by the people "affected". Yet it might be clear from the above that this is not the type of nostalgia we are talking about here.

Nostalgia that is born out of political disruptions often reflects disappointments over the direction that life has taken after the political events. As described above, this relates rather to *what one had hoped life to become* than to *what life was* before the political change. Although the notion of nostalgia might be used to depoliticize this feeling, such nostalgia as disappointment is in fact value-laden, and thereby inherently political. It is used to denote a grief for a faded past, as political rhetoric, and to signal inclusion within a certain (memory) group. As such, nostalgia, like memory, is about "defining and positioning oneself", and is "always linked to politics of identification and belonging."[78] Similarly, the late anthropologist of Eastern Germany Daphne Berdahl argued that in the specific case of the former GDR, many in Eastern Germany understand the all-German debates since 1990 about the nature of the SED regime as de-legitimisation not only of the old power holders, but also of their personal experiences in the GDR. Already in the early 1990s this triggered a form of nostalgia that should be seen as a critique of the contemporary societal changes rather than as an actual longing for the past itself.[79]

The Slovenian philosopher, sociologist and legal theorist Renata Salecl might be quite right when she states that nostalgia involves the refusal to take responsibility of one's destiny,

[76] This term is commonly used to describe people close to the former regime who continue to identify with the GDR. For just one of many examples, see Thomas Großbölting, "DDR-Legenden in der Erinnerungskultur und in der Wissenschaft. Eine Einleitung". In: Großbölting (ed.), *Friedensstaat, Leseland, Sportnation? DDR-Legenden auf dem Prüfstand* (Berlin 2009), pp. 9-21; here p. 10.
[77] Maria Todorova, "Introduction. From Utopia to Propaganda and Back". In: Maria Todorova and Zsusza Gille (eds.), *Post-Communist Nostalgia* (New York: Berghahn Books 2010), pp. 1-13; here p. 7.
[78] Dominic Boyer, "From Algos to Autonomos: Nostalgic Eastern Europe as Postimperial Mania". In: Maria Todorova and Zsusza Gille (eds.), *Post-Communist Nostalgia* (New York: Berghahn Books 2010), pp. 17-28; here p. 18.
[79] Daphne Berdahl, "'(N)Ostalgie' for the Present: Memory, Longing, and East German Things". In: *Ethnos* 64(2) (1999), pp. 192-211.

and "enables the hysteric to sustain the position of a suffering innocent victim"[80] of sweeping events. Yet, she is wrong where she maintains that nostalgia also necessarily entails the abandonment of individual agency. According to Salecl, "… since these times [for which nostalgia is felt] are forever gone, they [the nostalgics] do not need to act to improve their current situation."[81] In this view, all is lost already anyways, and therefore "nostalgics" are by definition not engaged in serious political struggle. I do not claim that there are no people who couple their nostalgia to general and apolitical resentment. And as the case of Gunther Klein above shows, some people did also retreat from political (as well as even social) life for being unable to cope with the present. Yet at the same time, the majority of the people I spoke with were, at an advanced age, still very active, and this social and political activity was of great importance to them. Moreover, they clearly interpret their resentment as stemming from political struggle – and, as we will see in chapter four on ISOR, they even go so far as to bring their cases before the highest German court. The "apolitical nostalgia" described by Salecl therefore does not fit the OKV activists I encountered, and seems more apt to describe the attitude of people who are less politically involved to begin with – whether they evaluate current affairs positively or negatively, and now as well as in the past.

Babett Bauer, in her monograph on *Kontrolle und Repression. Individuelle Erfahrungen in der DDR 1971-1989*,[82] identifies five different types of eye-witnesses (*Zeitzeugen*) of the late GDR. In her classification of repression experiences in the GDR, Bauer looks primarily at negative encounters with the MfS, and does not include the majority of the group of people that I am exploring in this thesis. One could therefore expect that all of her five groups, considering their negative experiences with the MfS, are not very prone to nostalgia. This is definitely true for the two groups of open dissidents that Bauer describes.[83] It also pertains to the group of people who were very critical of the SED regime in private, but who did not dare to make their political convictions public.[84] Yet two of the five groups Bauer identified are in

[80] Renata Salecl, "Where Is the Center?" Paper presented at the symposium *'Where Is the Center?'* of the Westfälischer Kunstverein (3 June 2000). Accessed 2 November 2016: https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/16183936/renata-salecl-where-is-the-center-3-juni-2000.

[81] Salecl, "Where Is the Center?"

[82] Babett Bauer, *Kontrolle und Repression. Individuelle Erfahrungen in der DDR 1971-1989* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht 2006).

[83] These include Bauer's *Typus I*, comprised of persons who were imprisoned in the GDR until early-mid 1980s and then moved to the FRG ("*Konsequente Systemablehnung in Familienmodell „Flucht" und Aussetzung der biographischen Selbstbestimmung durch Inhaftierung*"); and *Typus II* that covers persons who stayed in the GDR until its end, but who were actively engaged in protest against the GDR regime („*Individuelle Resistenz zur Erlangung persönlicher Selbstbehauptung und kollektive Systemopposition im Hinblick auf gesellschaftliche Reform*"). See Bauer, *Kontrolle und Repression.*

[84] This is the last group (*Typus V*), whose attitude is described by Bauer as "*Kritische Distanz und politische Doppelexistenz.*" According to Bauer, this group reflects very negatively on the GDR, and shows frustration

fact susceptible to *Ostalgie*, or nostalgia for the GDR. This includes persons who "apolitically" adjusted their personal behaviour to the requirements of the regime, but who nevertheless found themselves in contact with the Stasi after a while, usually through their involvement with people the MfS deemed "oppositional" (*Typus III*),[85] in addition to politically active persons who were (mildly) critical of the SED regime but also identified with the GDR, and sought to change the regime from within (*Typus IV*).[86]

It is this third, apolitical group described by Bauer which seems to be left out of Salecl's argument. According to Bauer, this group was unhappy about conditions in the GDR. Persons comprising this group were also aware of repression, through their forced contacts with the MfS. Yet at the same time they remained politically inactive. After 1990, they carried their mistrust of political institutions from the GDR into the FRG. Convinced of their inability to effect change, these people deny themselves agency by regarding politics as something that takes place above their heads, and regardless of their opinions.

At the same time, this group values social security over political freedoms. Economic and existential problems have led this group to a negative evaluation of the social changes that took place since the 1990s. Consequently, these people are often uncritical and apologetic of life in the GDR, which they now evaluate solely in social terms. Although socialism is seen as a "failed experiment", this failure is attributed to the leaders rather than to socialist ideals or the state structure of the GDR, which is also not seen as dictatorial or authoritarian, but which they rather justify and defend on the basis of its social advantages.[87] We thus have to do with a group of people inflicted by nostalgia, who are indeed politically inactive. This group, however, seems to have abandoned political agency not at the time they turned nostalgic but already long before: they were "apolitical" in GDR times and maintained this attitude after 1990. It is therefore doubtful whether feelings of nostalgia have anything to do with their lack of political activity.

In case of the second group Bauer describes, that of people who did identify with the GDR, albeit in a (mildly) critical manner, Salecl's description seems more apt. Bauer indeed notes that this group shares the nostalgic outlook of the first group in her typology, and has

about their personal political inconsistency in critical self-analyses of their actions during GDR times. Their appreciation for the newfound freedoms and human rights since the fall of the Berlin Wall make them unsusceptible to nostalgia for the GDR.

[85] Described by Bauer as "*Unpolitisches Dasein und erzwungene Kompromissbildung*". See Bauer, *Kontrolle und Repression*, p. 348.

[86] Described by Bauer as "*Kritisch-engagierte Identifikation und realsozialistischer Pragmatismus*". Ibid., p. 372; see for a short overview of the characteristics of the different group also pp. 437-440.

[87] Bauer, *Kontrolle und Repression*, pp. 455-456.

usually given up its previous interest in politics after the fall of the GDR and distanced itself from public and political life.[88]

Both these social groups are of interest to the OKV as potential target groups of its message. Because they share the OKV's feelings of nostalgia for the GDR, it is those groups that might potentially become convinced of a revisionist view of history. OKV organizations thus try to get these persons on board by playing the "Eastern German Identity Card", and by feeding into broader nostalgic sentiments. It is also to them that publications of the OKV are, in theory, directed. In practice, however, the efforts of the OKV to connect to these groups seem to have only very limited effects. This has to do both with the very specific nature of several OKV groups, which limit their activities mainly to the defence of former GDR elites' interests, and with the continued defence of those sides of the GDR that most people nowadays see as abject (especially the MfS).

Bauer intentionally leaves out of her study those groups of people who worked consciously and out of conviction with or for GDR state organs, and who seem therefore most likely to couple their memories of the GDR with a longing for political restoration. Salecl, on the other hand, seems to reject the notion of politically active nostalgics completely. For OKV members, however, personal memories play an important function in the legitimation of the former regime. In fact, when it comes to improving their current situation with regards to criminal investigations and pension rights, the argument of former GDR political and armed service cadres is based precisely on the view of themselves as the victims of political change. They have not done something wrong; instead, their side has "lost". Thus, their perception of victimhood is not a reason for political inactivity, but is used as an argument for their refusal to take upon themselves the blame accorded to them by society.[89]

In this context, it makes sense to look at Svetlana Boym's distinction between reflective and restorative nostalgia. According to Boym, reflective nostalgia concerns itself with looking back at lost lifeways and opportunities. This is the most commonly described nostalgia that can be defined as a "longing for longing". Taking as its vantage point the "knowing that what is looked at is 'really lost'", this nostalgia comes close to the apolitical nostalgia discussed by

[88] Bauer, *Kontrolle und Repression*, p. 456.

[89] This attitude was very clear from the interviews with Hans Bauer and Dieter Stiebert (14 June 2012), Wolfgang Schmidt (12 June 2012) and Siegfried Mechler (12 July 2012). It is also reflected in the literature produced by the different OKV organizations. Examples include, but are by no means limited to: GRH (ed.), *Siegerjustiz? Die politische Strafverfolgung infolge der Deutschen Einheit* (Berlin: Kai Homilius 2003); ISOR e.V. (ed.), *Wertneutralität des Rentenrechts. Strafrechte in Deutschland?* (2nd expanded edition, Berlin: Kai Homilius 2005); Erich Buchholz, *Dem Unrecht wehren: ein Berliner Jurist erzählt* (Berlin: Kai Homilius 2006).

Salecl. However, Boym acknowledges that there is also another type of nostalgia which does have politics at its core. This is what she dubs "restorative nostalgia", which "concerns itself with 'truth' and tries to recapture and preserve the essence of things perceived to have been lost or [to] be in decline."[90] In her study on the use of nostalgic sentiments in Russian politics, Boym refers to political, restorative nostalgia in the Russian case as "Utopian Nostalgia", which "emphasizes *nostos* (home) and dreams of rebuilding the utopian greater *Patria* – some version of the 'Russia we lost'".[91] Obviously, the re-establishment of a "Greater Germany" is not at the core of post-communist nostalgia in Eastern Germany. However, one could definitely describe the nostalgia of the OKV group as "dreaming of some version of the GDR we lost". As might be clear from the above, such nostalgia is by no means without agenda, and it would therefore be a mistake to not regard nostalgia as a political sentiment.

What we see is that personal accounts of politics and history go hand in hand. In a cyclical motion, political demands are fed by historical revisionism, which in turn is fed by personal memories that fit into this revisionist narrative template, and that are often linked to feelings of nostalgia for the GDR. This then again leads to a justification of the GDR, including its policies. However, it is important to separate the OKV's brand of revisionism from the restorative nostalgia described by Boym. Svetlana Boym's wariness of restorative nostalgia is certainly very understandable in the Russian context, where there is a broader popular sentiment that mourns the loss of the Soviet Union. What matters here, however, is context. In Germany, the OKV operates as a minority group that advocates a positive assessment of the GDR, but is well aware that any return to state socialism is regarded as utterly unattractive by the wider public.

OKV members' feeling of living in a hostile environment comes from the loss of a state they identified with and the professional status and social safety it gave them. It also results from the continuation of its Manichaean worldview that understood any criticism to the leading socialist ideology as hostile. Their narratives can indeed be called "nostalgic", in the sense of longing for a bygone past, yet at the same time these stories have a very specific political purpose in the present as they are closely tied to a legitimation of the GDR. In several cases, such as former Stasi officers and NVA soldiers serving at the border between the two German states, this political legitimation also undergirds the justification of personal

[90] Svetlana Boym, "Restorative Nostalgia and Return to Origins", chapter 4 of her *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York 2001), pp. 44-45 .
[91] Svetlana Boym, "From the Russian Soul to Post-Communist Nostalgia". In: *Representations* 49 (1995), pp. 133-166; here p. 151.

actions which are now commonly condemned as having been wrong and in some cases illegal. The GRH's demands for legal acquittal of former officials and ISOR's struggle for pension reparations are likewise based on the political legitimation of past activities. This does, however, not go for all OKV members. Yet to all of them a positive image of the GDR is central to a positive evaluation of personal activities in the former state – and thereby to a positive self-image. In a system that continually justified the "means" (political repression) through its "ends" (a communist society), the failed aspirations of "really existing socialism" automatically call these means into question. And yet OKV members identified with the GDR and its policy, and frequently were engaged in their implementation. This also explains their willingness to "forget" negative experiences, either by neglecting them completely or by rendering them "un-political" through what I have called "compartmentalized dis-remembering". Their adherence to a positive political interpretation of the GDR in turn provides them with a framework for making sense of the ruptures in their lives since 1989. Within this group, these ruptures are interpreted as the outcome of a deep-seated and continuing West German anti-communism.[92] This enables OKV members to understand the hostility they experienced after 1989 as the outcome of capitalist aggression that alleviates them from the burden of investigating what was wrong in the GDR – and their own share thereof. In this sense, the nostalgia of the OKV is a nostalgia not so much for the way the GDR was, but for the way in which the GDR understood itself to be – something which, following Glaeser, could be characterized as "epistemic nostalgia".

[92] This was a general trope that came back in the stories of most informants, especially in relation to the marginalization and prosecution of specific groups of former GDR cadres, and in relation to historiography on the GDR. This includes e.g. the stories of Dieter Stiebert and Hans Bauer (interview 14 June 2012); Dieter Feuerstein (interview 11 July 2012); Siegfried Mechler (interview 12 July 2012); Hans Modrow (interview 26 November 2013); and Matthias Werner (interview 8 May 2015).

Chapter 2:

OKV Biographies: Shared Memories and Arguments

The following chapter discusses the (auto)biographies of several OKV activists. How do they look back on their lives in the GDR, and how have they experienced life since 1989? How can this explain their attachment to the OKV? This chapter focusses on the personal narratives of individuals, and is largely based on the interviews I conducted with 30 persons between 2012 and 2015. Most of them were active in one or several member organizations of the OKV. My interviewees hail from the three largest OKV organizations ISOR, GRH and GBM, as well as from several of the OKV's smaller associations. Through their networks I also got into contact with people who were not active in any specific organization attached to the OKV, but who can be described as sympathizers belonging to the extended network of OKV members and friends. Generally, I first asked them to tell me about their lives in the GDR and after 1989, and then about the activities of their respective organizations and their personal role therein. Interviews and conversations usually lasted from two and a half up to five hours, and sometimes even longer, stretching over several days. As a rule, people already expected to be asked to tell about their personal past, and were happy to do so.[1] The acting directors of ISOR (Wolfgang Schmidt) and the GRH (Hans Bauer and Dieter Stiebert) preferred to talk mainly about organizational matters. Because of their central roles in these organizations and the valuable insights they could give as to the development of these organizations from the early 1990s onwards, I spoke with them several times.[2] Their remarks are often indicative of the understanding of history and political outlook of their organizations' members.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the socialist autobiography as a background to the individual biographical accounts of OKV representatives and sympathizers. In part I, seven such accounts will be presented in some detail. The second part of this chapter analyses the material from the perspective of memory and nostalgia and political formation (as discussed in chapter 1), and attempts to formulate the characteristics of the particular "OKV cohort". In the second part of this chapter, we shall then look at the specific anchor points that were stressed in all life histories, and that together compose the broad outline of all individual

[1] When visiting meetings and events that were related to the OKV, I often had people coming up to me insisting that I should record their life stories. On the other hand, people who did not want to share their personal stories could easily decline my request or refrain from contacting me.

[2] Interviews with Wolfgang Schmidt 12 June 2012; 8 August 2013; 28 November 2013; double interview with Dieter Stiebert and Hans Bauer, 14 June 2012; conversation with Hans Bauer, 12 December 2013.

OKV narratives on life in the GDR, to conclude with a discussion of the political considerations behind these uniformed life stories.

The socialist autobiography

The ideological vantage point that OKV members share accounts for some of the similarities in their personal stories. Given that there are significant differences in personal (family, local) backgrounds and professional careers, these stories are still remarkably similar both in form and content. In fact, throughout all interviews conducted, people used the exact same anchor points in the history of the GDR to tell their life stories. An explanation for this can be found in the shared memory culture of the GDR, and more particularly in the socialist fostering of stereotypical autobiographies that link the personal with the political. The GDR shaped not only the biographies of my interview partners, but also their way of presenting them. Moreover, focussing on (auto)biographies brings out the importance of generational experiences.

The practice of autobiography-writing for the state developed in the early Soviet Union, and was carried over into East Germany. Typically, people living in socialist states had to compile autobiographical accounts on several occasions. These included events that were common to all, such as at several times during the school career, and specific events such as when applying for SED membership or upon job promotion within state institutions. The life histories so composed were then used by party and state to assess the compilers' socialist credentials. At the heart of socialist theory lies the belief that socialism objectively and scientifically is a more humane, better system than capitalism. Accordingly, the value of socialism is not a matter of argument, but rather a matter of proper (ideological) understanding – or "consciousness". It was thus a central task of socialist authorities to raise citizens' consciousness in support of socialism. The value attached to citizens' ideological convictions meant that the state was keenly interested in the extent to which socialist values had become internalized by its subjects. It then used such data for recruitment and career advancement of cadres, as well as for identifying, and ultimately repressing, possible dissent.[3]

What is obvious is that autobiographies served a particular purpose under socialism – and citizens were keenly aware of this. Showing the required commitment to the ideals of

[3] Jochen Hellbeck, "Galaxy of Black Stars: The Power of Soviet Biography". In: *The American Historical Review* 114 (3) (2009), pp. 615-624; here p. 620.

socialism and antifascism and to the East German state moreover required a specific narrative form that followed closely the GDR's official history. To show a proper attitude, the composer of the autobiography had to align his or her personal life with the state, including its goals and institutions. This was typically done by composing one's personal history with reference to generally acknowledged important historical and social events, in an attempt to show how these events had impacted on the growth of the individual's socialist consciousness. As Jochen Hellbeck remarked:

> For Soviet citizens, to have and cultivate a biography was a matter of intense political relevance; how they presented their life data was critical for their standing in Soviet society. Beyond this, Soviet biography could be *a source for great personal meaning and power*. In inscribing themselves into the Communist drama of human struggle and salvation, individuals could claim for themselves the roles of active participants on a world historical stage.[4]

Citizens were also aware of the necessity to show consistency in their autobiographical narratives. In the GDR, change of details in subsequent life accounts constituted a punishable act.[5] Yet even a narrative that remained consistent over time did not preclude the possibility of "biography-based persecution", as the data stored in life narratives could always be subjected to reinterpretation, transforming previously harmless episodes into dangerous *kompromat*.[6] This, we may suspect, also contributed to a culture in which people tried to keep their memories, or at least their narratives thereof, stable. The official forms of autobiography were so internalized that many people closely adhered to them also for their private notebooks.[7]

Comparisons between the Soviet Union and East Germany are obviously not coincidental.[8] After Nazi defeat, Soviet officials and military officers were directly engaged in setting up state socialism in East Germany through the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD). This included large-scale projects to re-educate the population "in accordance with [the Soviet] biographical matrix and its underlying voluntarist design."[9] In her collective biography of East German veteran communists, Epstein notes that party control

[4] Hellbeck, "Galaxy of Black Stars", p. 623. Emphasis mine.
[5] Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, p. 134.
[6] Ibid., p. 134-135.
[7] Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind. Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2006), pp. 55-56.
[8] Although we should not underestimate the particularities that characterized any specific socialist country, it is obvious that there were many more similarities that bound them together. For a discussion of the family resemblances among socialist countries, see Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1996), pp. 19-30.
[9] Hellbeck, "Galaxy of Black Stars", p. 622.

over its cadres included control over the interpretation of individual pasts. In what she calls the "politics of biography",[10] Epstein describes how the regime encouraged veteran communists to write autobiographies for propagandistic purposes, while at the same time not hesitating to use these accounts against them.[11] Especially in the 1950s, several high-ranking veteran communists had to endure inquiry into their personal biographies, and were subjected to brutal disciplinary measures if these included suspicious elements.

The SED leadership used the biographies of veteran communists, as the heroes of antifascism, for legitimizing the state. A rigid stereotyping of biographical accounts was also meant to avoid that individual Old Communists might achieve a personal charisma that had the potential to undermine the claim that the antifascist victory was a collective communist enterprise. Ultimately, the celebrated official communist biographies were stripped of their individuality: "veteran communists became mere walking symbols of the collective archetype of the antifascist hero."[12] Epstein describes the "master narrative" so produced, which typically "began with the birth of the long-time communist into the poverty of working-class life in Imperial Germany" and then continued with a fixed set of events, from the acquisition of political consciousness and the joining of the KPD, to participation in Weimar-era political struggles and resistance activities against Nazism (either in Nazi captivity or in exile), to the (self)liberation from fascism and building of a socialist state, and culminating with the success of the GDR as the grand finale of a revolutionary life.[13]

As we shall see in this chapter, OKV members adhere to a very similar narrative pattern.[14] This narrative pattern is the outcome of GDR practices, by which ordinary citizens, and especially party and state functionaries, regularly engaged in biography-writing for the state (albeit without the intention to publish their accounts). The OKV's master narrative, however, touches upon different anchor points than that of the veteran communists. This can be explained by the younger age of OKV activists: They were too young to be engaged in politics before 1933 but grew up against the backdrop of the Second World War, and came of age in the GDR. These experiences were formative for their outlook in life. Their stories thus reflect, to quote Reinhard Koselleck, the mutually conditioning "store of experience"

[10] Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, p. 9.
[11] Ibid., esp. pp. 130-157.
[12] Ibid., p. 10.
[13] Ibid., pp. 196-197.
[14] To the master narrative of veteran communists we will also return in chapter 3, in the context of OKV organizations that maintain the heritage of Ernst Thälmann.

(*Erfahrungshaushalt*) and "horizon of expectation" (*Erwartungshorizont*) of a different generation.[15]

I: OKV activists' stories

The seven biographies that now follow are meant to be a characteristic cross-section of the OKV membership. This includes testimonies of former Stasi officers who play a leading role in the OKV, but also testimonies that show the variety of other personal and professional backgrounds among OKV members.[16] In addition to persons who are portrayed in detail, I also draw on the results of interviews with other persons who were willing to share their life stories and views with me. This group comprised Ernst Jager,[17] board member of the GBM; Erhard Richter,[18] formerly the secretary-general of the GDR's wrestling association and currently speaker of both the *Freundeskreis des Sportsenioren* and the GRH's *AG Sport*; Rolf Berthold, former GDR ambassador to China and currently speaker of the *RotFuchs Förderverein*;[19] Eberhard Rehling,[20] former department leader of the GDR's Ministry for Science and Technology and currently the speaker of the *Sozialer Arbeitskreis Treptow/Köpenick*; Rudolf Denner,[21] former foreign trade agent for the GDR and board member of the OKV, primarily engaged in the *Freundeskreis Palast der Republik* and *Freundeskreis Ernst Thälmann Gesellschaft Buchenwald*; Gabrielle Senft,[22] a photographer known for her continued engagement with "workers' photography" and for her photo project on the Serbian village of Varvarin who is active in the GBM; Günter Leo,[23] former general commander of the NVA's Berlin border troops and chair of the *AG Grenze/International* of

[15] Reinhart Koselleck, "'Space of Experience' and 'Horizon of Expectation': Two Historical Categories". In: Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press 2004), pp. 255-276.
[16] My goal with presenting these cases is to give a general idea of the members of the OKV – which can, due to space limits, never be completely representative. In line with the background of most OKV members, I included three Stasi officers in the selection – yet whose experiences with the Stasi differ. I also included Klaus Wons (the former cultural director of the Palast der Republik) and Siegfried Mechler (a former professor of economics at the HU and for a long time the president of the OKV) as examples of people with a different background who share the same outlook on history.
[17] Interview with Ernst Jager, 6 August 2013.
[18] Interview with Erhard Richter, 7 November 2012.
[19] Interview with Rolf Berthold, 7 November 2012. The *RotFuchs Förderverein* is an organization linked to the extreme left opinion magazine *RotFuchs*. It was originally established as the legal carrier of the magazine, but has in recent years transformed into a member-based organization which also organizes activities for its members.
[20] Interview with Eberhard Rehling, 9 November 2012.
[21] Double interview with Rudolf Denner and Klaus Wons, 10 July 2012; double interview with Siegfried Mechler and Rudolf Denner, 8 November 2012.
[22] Interview with Gabrielle Senft, 6 August 2013.
[23] Interview with Günter Leo, 12 December 2013.

the GRH; Hans Modrow,[24] a prominent SED- and later PDS- and *Linke*-politician; and Klaus Blessing, former director of the department of machine building with the Central Committee of the SED and vice-president of the OKV. It also includes the aforementioned ISOR acting director Wolfgang Schmidt, [25] a former Stasi officer who has been a very vocal advocate of the erstwhile secret service since 1990; as well as former Stasi officer Dieter Stiebert and GDR public prosecutor Hans Bauer,[26] both members of the GRH board. A group of younger people also involved in OKV subsidiary organizations, but not in the central organization of the association, included Max Renkl, the young leader of the *Freundeskreis Ernst Thälmann Gedenkstätte Ziegenhals*, and activists of organizations that have connections with, but are not part of, the OKV, such Anja and Bernd Mewes,[27] two *Linke* activists in the *Friedensglockengesellschaft*; and Wolf Stötzel and Peter Schroeder, who are active members of the *LAG Buchenwald*, a group of (grand)children of communist Buchenwald prisoners from the VVN-BdA.[28] In addition, I also conducted interviews with some relatives and friends of central figures within the OKV.[29] For the sake of brevity, I will not relate all their stories in detail. A systematic overview of the individual OKV organizations to which these persons contribute will be given in chapter four.

Stasi Officer: Helmut Holfert (*ISOR; OKV editor*)

Helmut Holfert[30] was born in 1938 in Dippoldiswalde (Saxony) as the last of four sons. His two eldest brothers fell in World War II. Their father, who had also been drafted into the German army, did not return from Soviet war imprisonment until 1947. Although war experiences were not much discussed at home, Holfert claims that they made a lasting impression on both him and his remaining older brother. He also recalls seeing the bombing

[24] Interview with Hans Modrow, 26 November 2013. More on Modrow in chapter 5.
[25] Interviews with Wolfgang Schmidt, 12 June 2012; 8 August 2013; 28 November 2013. Wolfgang Schmidt founded an "insiders' committee" (*Insiderkomitee*) of former Stasi members to inform the public about the MfS from an insider perspective. He was also active in the organization of a series of "*Zwiegespräche*" (dialogues) between Stasi victims and officers in the early 1990s, and remains engaged in a polemic public debate about the Stasi with Hubertus Knabe, the director of the Stasi prison memorial in Berlin *Hohenschönhausen*. For more on Schmidt, see chapter four on ISOR.
[26] Double interview with Dieter Stiebert and Hans Bauer, 14 June 2012.
[27] Interview with Anja and Bernd Mewes, 8 August 2013.
[28] The group initially was set up by former communist Buchenwald prisoners themselves, with their (grand)children included from the 1990s onwards. Interviews with Wolf Stötzel, 9 August 2013 and 27 November 2013, and conversation of 14 December 2013; interview with Peter Schroeder, 6 August 2013. At the time of the interview, there was controversy over Peter Schroeder's membership in the *LAG Buchenwald*, which seemed to be based on personal conflicts.
[29] Double interview with Margitta Mechler and Gertrud Fischer, 13 June 2012; Collective interview with Gertrud Fischer et al., 12 July 2012; Interview with Beate Steinmetz, 11 July 2012.
[30] Interview Helmut Holfert, 10 July 2012.

of Dresden and the subsequent influx of severely traumatized refugees into his native village, including a woman shocked to find out that her hair had turned completely white in one day. According to Holfert, his childhood memories, and particularly the loss of his two brothers, contributed to his commitment to the antifascist and pacifist doctrine of the GDR. This ideological commitment, in combination with his anger over the developments in the FRG, where "those who were responsible for the death of our two brothers, and for the participation in war and imprisonment of our father … again were in power", made his remaining brother (b. 1930) and Helmut Holfert himself join the armed forces of the GDR, the initial doubts of their mother notwithstanding. His brother started to work for the Volkspolizei in 1950, and in 1958 Helmut Holfert joined the MfS's military unit *Wachregiment Berlin*. This suggests that Holfert internalized the antifascist narrative of the GDR and the idea that the FRG should be seen as the direct successor, and through its capitalism even as the continuation, of Nazi Germany. In the same period, Helmut Holfert became an SED member. He received an education as radio operator, and remained in the *Wachregiment* until 1982, at which time he took the opportunity to be transferred directly into the MfS in order, according to himself, to expand his career. He worked in the Department of Information in the top-secret, top-security Honecker-bunker in Prenden (Wandlitz) until January 1990, when, facing the imminent extinction of the MfS, he requested his dismissal. Holfert then had several short-term jobs and retired in 2002.

As a radio operator, Holfert says to have been mainly responsible for the security of top-level international calls. As a token of his remaining attachment to his previous function, he shows a tattoo of a radio tower on his arm. Repeatedly he stresses that the responsibilities of the *Wachregiment*, namely to secure the GDR's state and party top, were carried out in similar ways in the FRG. Thus, he is eager to point out that his work had nothing to do with the internal spying on GDR citizens, which gave the MfS its bad name. Such statements suggest that Holfert is well aware of the internal operations of the MfS, and of the fact that these are commonly held to have been immoral. Holfert also tried to protect the image of his former colleagues and friends in other departments by pointing to similarities between the security services of GDR and FRG:

> So, these were the tasks [we had]. What I [should] say about the security tasks, let's say for the government, and for the party… Analogously, there was a security group in [the West German capital] Bonn. In Bonn. Which was there to accompany and protect the *Bundeskanzler* and others. At that time, in the ministry [MfS] there was also a department for personal protection [*Hauptabteilung Personenschutz*]. Yes, so all who were state functionaries, party functionaries, and so on, they got personal protection.

> And they [the agents] were well trained. But, I repeat this, analogously to the security group [in] Bonn. And they didn't do anything else… than that. The personal protection [group] of the MfS was so well trained that many [of its agents] were taken over [into FRG state security after unification] without discussion. Who then were [security for] Kohl and others. And who still are today.

Despite stressing the similarities between GDR and FRG state security measures, Holfert's personal story also acknowledges that there were differences. He described as a bitter experience that because of his and his brother's careers their mother was not able to travel to her second son's grave in West Germany.[31] Still, Holfert remains convinced of the socialist ideals of the GDR, as well as of the rightness of his work for the MfS, and he sees his public engagement in ISOR and the OKV as a way to "stand by [his] biography"; this attitude is also reflected on his personal website where he explains his ideological position in detail.[32] The idea that a person needs to "stand by his biography" came back in many of the interviews, and also suggests that the features of the socialist form of autobiography writing is still very present.[33]

Cultural functionary: Klaus Wons, 1935-2013 (*Freundeskreis Palast der Republik*)

Klaus Wons[34] was born in 1935 as the third of four sons in a family in Berlin Gesundbrunnen (later West Berlin). Wons recounts that his father was a communist and was charged with high treason under Hitler – but managed to "save himself" from court. Despite this background, Wons' father and two elder brothers were all drafted into the German Army – the youngest at age fourteen. All would return from Soviet prison camps after three to five years. The bombings of Berlin in the last phase of the war led Wons' mother to flee the city to Swanenberg (*Kreis* Bernau), where the family stayed also after the war had ended.

Wons' involvement with the SED started when working as an apprentice at a bakery in Berlin in the early 1950s. His foreman on the shop floor (*Bäckermeister*) knew of his enthusiastic involvement in cultural associations in his hometown, and stimulated him to further this hobby in connection with the authorities. According to Wons, his superior had

[31] Her oldest son died at the eastern front, close to Kharkiv (Ukraine). The exact location of his grave remains unknown.
[32] www.heho-oberspree.de.
[33] In connection to this, Jochen Hellbeck noted in 2009 that the "biographical frame" is still used among East Germans (of different political colors) much more frequently than among West Germans. Hellbeck, "Galaxy of Black Stars", p. 622.
[34] Double interview with Rudolf Denner and Klaus Wons, 10 July 2012.

> seen my inner convictions, and the activities I conducted, and asked me if I wanted to become a member of the SED. And he then explained [the ideology and institutions of the new state] to me, [because] at that point I knew very little of it all.

This statement seems to contradict his assertion that the Wons family had already been communist in outlook. Yet it is also clear that the war caused Wons' father's absence during most of his youth. In this light, the role of the communist *Bäckermeister* as a mentor and role model to the young Wons is very important. In 1954, Wons became a member of the SED. By that point, he had formed several theatre groups, including a costume group that would become an official group of German-Soviet friendship. After joining the party, Wons went on to study at the pioneer leader's school in Sommerswalde.

From there, Klaus Wons made a successful career in the cultural institutions of the GDR, starting as a youth club leader and ending as the cultural program officer of the *Palast der Republik* in East Berlin. In 2012, he still spoke with great enthusiasm of all his cultural activities and the several youth clubs that he had supervised. The years in the *Palast der Republik*, where he initially started out as the leader of the youth club, he called "the most beautiful years of my life". Consequently, the closure of the *Palast*, already in 1990 after the discovery of asbestos, was "bitter". For several years, he and a group of (former) colleagues held hopes that the *Palast* would re-open. These hopes were finally crushed when the Bundestag decided in May 2010 that the entire structure of the building needed to be demolished in order to make space for the new building of the "Humboldt-Forum", with the baroque façade of the town castle of Berlin that had occupied the same place before the GDR tore down its remnants in 1950.

Nevertheless, in 2012 Wons was still convinced that the memory of the *Palast* should be kept alive, which he did through the *Freundeskreis Palast der Republik*. Remarkably, and despite the obvious support he obtained from authorities in shaping his cultural career, Wons' memories of the *Palast* were for him hardly connected to politics at all. Throughout the interview, Wons stressed the cultural activities that he was engaged in, and that obviously were central to his life. Wons looked back at his time in the *Palast* as a period of great professional joy and fulfilment, when he could engage in culture to an unparalleled extent. In fact, even after more than two decades, Wons seemed unwilling or unable to admit the political aspects of his position as cultural programmer of the GDR's most prestigious building (which – in a clear demonstration of its political function – also housed the East

German parliament, the *Volkskammer*). In the immediate post-*Wende* period, some of his neighbours harassed him for having been too close to the GDR regime:

> And you shouldn't believe that they are all just friendly, the people. Well [*Also*], to start with [in the post-*Wende* period], I also received some really nice threats in my neighbourhood, such as… [silence] Yes, well, how do you think it was? My mailbox was smeared, and I obtained notes, and such things … "Red pig" [*Rote Sau*] and the devil knows what more was written [in front of my house] in snow. *Ach*, this all happened. Back then, there was a strong rise of [negative] sentiments.

Although Wons clearly identified with GDR politics, he did not see himself as somebody who had been involved in politics. Consequently, the anger that others directed towards him seems to have taken him by genuine surprise, and even by 2012 it still visibly upset and pained him. For Wons, the cultural value of his activities always came first.

The loss of these activities led to great disappointment, including in politics. Wons left the SED in 1989, with the big demonstration before the *Palast*. He then (re)joined the PDS for a short while, until his membership was cancelled when he "couldn't pay contribution for three months". Although he "did write letters", he soon decided to let matters rest, obviously also because he felt let down by the Party. Wons did not join a party ever since, although he remained, in his words, a socialist. His post-GDR activities were entirely directed at the revival of the *Palast* (that is, both the building and its cultural programme), first in the citizens' initiative *ProPalast* that aimed to prevent the demolition of the *Palast*, and, after the *Palast* was torn down, in the *Freundeskreis Palast der Republik*. Klaus Wons died in 2013.

Former spy: Dieter Feuerstein (GBM, *Kundschafter des Friedens*)

Dieter Feuerstein[35] (b. 1955) was raised in West Germany. This, as well as the fact that he was more than two decades younger than the average OKV members, made him somewhat of an anomaly within the organization. Yet his personal career as a Stasi spy in his native FRG shows his firm attachment to the GDR before 1989, and he remains devoted to its ideological and historical outlook up until today. When I interviewed Feuerstein, he, like all others, began with a long story of his attachment to socialism. And despite being born ten years after war's end, his story too started with the Nazi period, when his grandfather was imprisoned by the Nazis for being a Social Democrat. According to Feuerstein, this was also one of the reasons why his own father was sent to the front at the age of sixteen. His father was then interned as

[35] Interviews with Dieter Feuerstein, 13 June 2012 and 11 July 2012.

a prisoner of war in a Polish camp, where KPD propagandists convinced him to join the communist cause. Subsequently, his father finished high school in Leipzig and studied (Marxist) economy in Berlin. Feuerstein claims that in 1956, when he himself was one year old, the SED ordered his father to go to West Germany, where his parents had already been living. In the FRG, Feuerstein senior studied mechanical engineering, and he eventually became, following directions of the Stasi, a board member of the German branch of American razor blade company Gilette.[36] According to Feuerstein, he and his father got along very well, and his father taught him a lot about Marxist philosophy. Yet somehow, he also seems to be unhappy with the rather "bland" past of his father, for the latter only joined the communists upon Nazi defeat. His narrative was laced with references to authoritative veteran communists he had contacts with in his youth, including such persons as Emil Carlebach, one of the leading figures of the illegal KPD organization in the Buchenwald concentration camp. Feuerstein is moreover convinced that Ernst Bloch was his grandfather. Despite the fact that his interest in communism was apparently fostered at home, it nevertheless came to a conflict between father and son when young Dieter, inspired by the many leftist movements that sprang up in and after 1968, decided to join the German Communist Party (*Deutsche Kommunistische Partei*, DKP). In a confidential talk, Feuerstein senior then confessed to his son that he was active as a spy for the MfS, and suggested that his son become a member of the SED.

Feuerstein followed this advice, and would later start his own career as a spy for the MfS. In 1973, his father unexpectedly died from a heart attack. This left Feuerstein without the ideological mentor that his father had been to him; and this position was now taken over by the Stasi. He claimed that at the time, he actually wished to move to the GDR, but was instead requested to remain in West Germany as an agent of the MfS:

> Well, my intention was actually… Because my mother also said that she had felt well [living] in the GDR, and then we said [to each other], let's go [live] in the GDR. That was such an imagination [*Vorstellung*], yes. Of course. Why not? But then soon the consideration [of the MfS] was… "Say, you… can of course also stay there [*drüben*]. Without entering the DKP. So, for us. That is, in the footsteps of your father." This consideration was there from the start, of course.[37]

[36] According to Dieter Feuerstein, this "American firm" was also involved in military development. More specifically, so Feuerstein, the German branch of the firm had a department developing "laser and target optics" that could be used for weapons, and therefore this company was of operational interest to the MfS.
[37] Interview with Dieter Feuerstein, 13 June 2012.

On the suggestion of the GDR's secret services, Feuerstein then studied Aerospace Engineering (*Luft- und Raumfahrttechnik*), and rose to become the person in charge of top-secret files at the West-German military engineering company MBB.

His career would last until 1990, when in the wake of the unification his secret activities for the MfS were disclosed. Dieter was subsequently sentenced to eight years of imprisonment, of which he served four years before being released. Feuerstein claims that his wife knew of his activities, or was even implicated in them, but she remained free. In the end, their marriage did not survive the four years of separation. After being released, Dieter took over the care for their two children (born 1985 and 1987) and worked in several professions. Until 2011, he lived in Frankfurt where he conducted a licence research office. He currently lives near Berlin and works part-time as a tutor.

Despite never having lived in the GDR, Dieter Feuerstein remains convinced that this was the better German state. During our conversations, he signalled several times that this had been his true homeland. Feuerstein remains proud of his achievements as a spy for East Germany. He also remains a convinced communist, and is active in the DKP. Feuerstein has been a member of the GBM for many years, and in 2011 and 2012 he briefly served as this organization's manager (*Geschäftsführer*). He then resigned from this position rather abruptly, according to his personal account due to disagreements with then-newly elected GBM chairman Karl-Heinz Wendt. In the past, Feuerstein was also active in the organization *Kundschafter des Friedens fordern Recht* ("Scouts of Peace Demand Their Rights"), an association of former GDR spies who had been active mainly in the FRG. Feuerstein has also published on his past, including in collected volumes of the *Kundschafter*,[38] and gives talks about his life story to interested audiences.[39] From his stories, it is clear that he enjoys talking about his past, especially the prestige and attention that this brings him. It is obvious that, for his life story to have effect on people, he is confined to move in the rather contracted circles in which having been a Stasi spy carries such a positive aura.

[38] See e.g. Dieter Feuerstein, "Die Toten bleiben jung". In: Klaus Eichner and Gotthold Schramm (eds.), *Top-Spione im Westen. Spitzenquellen der DDR-Aufklärung erinnern sich* (2nd ed., Berlin: Edition Ost 2008), pp. 159-192. The editors of the book are not members of the organization *Kundschafter des Friedens*, but instead are members of the workgroup *Aufklärer* of the GRH. The main difference between the two organizations is that the former focusses solely on western spies, while the latter mainly includes former personnel of the *Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung* of the MfS. The overlap between the two organizations, also in term of membership, is however considerable.

[39] I visited one of these talks in August 2013, at an evening organized by the local DKP in Berlin. On this occasion, Feuerstein talked about his past as a spy for the MfS, and his subsequent time in prison. His talk sketched his former activities in an almost heroic light, including detailed accounts of how Feuerstein succeeded in remaining undisclosed, and how he secretly took photos of sensitive and secret documents with a mini-handcamera.

Socialist academician: Siegfried Mechler (GRH/OKV)

Siegfried Mechler[40] was born in 1935 in Löwenberg, Silesia (now part of Poland). His father, who worked as a bus driver for the *Deutsche Post* (German Post services), joined the NSDAP in 1938, "in order to remain a state servant". In 1944, he was "drafted into the infamous Waffen-SS". As the eastern front came ever more westward in early 1945, Frau Mechler, Siegfried and his younger sister first moved to a temporary accommodation in Marienbad, before finding more permanent lodging with family in Jessen (East Germany, near Wittenberg).

Father Mechler was taken into custody as a prisoner of war by the British and was thus released in the West German zone. Yet according to Siegfried, it was him who decided as a 12-year old boy that it was best to have his father cross the border into the Soviet occupied zone in 1947, instead of the rest of the family moving west. He claims that this had more to do with newfound friends and the possibility of inheriting the family house, than with ideological concerns. It is also clear, however, that young Mechler quickly became convinced of the new antifascist doctrine propagated by the Soviet authorities. Mechler claims that he is still bothered by his father's service in the SS, and particularly by the possibility that he committed individual crimes. Yet he believed that his father's willingness to move into the Soviet zone confirmed that he did not commit any serious war crimes, although he also admitted that the topic was taboo at home.[41]

Siegfried Mechler's subsequent narrative of life in the GDR is a model example of the rapid social advancement of the *Aufsteigergeneration*. After finishing school in 1949, Mechler was trained as a toolmaker; after two and a half years he was able to end his training via a fast-track procedure in order to take up a study place at the *Arbeiter- und Bauernfakultät* in Dresden. From there, he went on to study political economy at the Humboldt University (HU) in Berlin. He had already become a candidate member of the SED in 1954, and during his long career at the HU he would fulfil several voluntary political functions within his faculty, including that of secretary of the FDJ youth organization and later party secretary. He wrote a PhD dissertation on the reasons why so many young people chose to leave socialist

[40] Interview with Siegfried Mechler, 12 July 2012; Interview with Siegfried Mechler and Rudolf Denner, 8 November 2012; personal conversation with Siegfried Mechler, 12 December 2013; personal conversation with Siefgried and Margitta Mechler, 28 November 2013.

[41] "Aber dieser Schritt, dass er freiwillig in die Ostzone gekommen ist, ist eigentlich für mich der Beweis dafür, dass er persönlich an Verbrechen ... nicht beteiligt war." Interview with Siegfried Mechler, 12 July 2012.

agriculture.[42] Yet this topic became controversial once the political climate tightened after the Prague Spring of 1968; as a result, despite his political credentials Mechler ended up spending several years "out in production", meaning he was removed from the university. From conversations with his wife, Margitta Mechler, it became clear that this was a period of considerable hardship for the family. Yet in his personal life narrative, Siegfried Mechler chose not to dwell on the subject, instead arguing for the importance of keeping in touch with the (practical) work floor. In the end, Mechler spent most of his active career at the Economics department of the HU, where he eventually became a full professor in the mid-1980s. And then, as he puts it, "came the West, and I became a nobody".[43]

Shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Economics faculty of the HU was subjected to restructuring ("unwinding"). Once it became clear to him that he was the next to go, Mechler took early retirement. Remaining a convinced communist, and moreover convinced of the unjustness of the way in which "the west had taken over", he soon became politically active, most noticeably as a founding member of the GRH. He met the other founders of this association in the context of the first lawsuits against former GDR functionaries in the early 1990s. In a clear attempt to link the post-socialist treatment of former functionaries to that of earlier generations of socialists, Mechler proposed to organize *Solidaritätssitzen* (which roughly translates as "to sit in solidarity") for the prosecuted:

> And then I started an initiative in my neighbourhood. I remembered how, in the time when social democracy was still revolutionary… around 1800… At the times of the Bismarck-law… Whenever a chief editor of a social democratic newspaper was too big-mouthed, he was imprisoned. A week, or 14 days, such were the conditions at that time. And in order not to lose the chief editor for those 14 days, newspapers had so-called "sitting editors" [*Sitzredakteure*], who went to prison in place of the chief editor. At that time, the laws allowed this. And that's where I said, we should spur the development of solidarity, and conduct such *Solidaritätssitzen*. And so I collected volunteers for these *Solidaritätssitzen* among my circles of friends, acquaintances and comrades.[44]

Although this plan could not be carried out (contemporary German law does not allow to serve a prison sentence as a proxy), the GRH became the organization most active in "organizing solidarity" for prosecuted functionaries. From 1995 until 2004, Siegfried Mechler was the director of this organization.

[42] The full title of the dissertation that Mechler defended in 1964 was "Zur Abwanderung von Jugendlichen aus der Sozialistischen Landwirtschaft: Ein Beitrag zu ihrer Überwindung."
[43] Interview with Siegfried Mechler, 12 July 2012.
[44] Interview with Siegfried Mechler, 12 July 2012.

In 2004, Mechler became director of the OKV umbrella, a position that he occupied for nearly ten years until he resigned during the bi-annual OKV board meeting of December 2013.[45] In keeping up with his self-image as a professor, Mechler published a series of books on the wrongs of German unification.[46]

Stasi drop-out: Eberhard Schulz (*Ernst Busch Gesellschaft*/GBM)

Eberhard Schulz[47] was born in 1931 as the oldest of five children to communist parents. When Hitler came to power in 1933, his father was put into penitentiary. This was a potent reminder for the rest of the family to keep quiet and accommodate themselves with the regime, including, for young Eberhard, by joining the *Hitler-Jugend* and later to participate in the, as he recalls it, "thoroughly fascist" Nazi *Jugendweihe*. The GDR continued this ritual of youth consecration, but as Schulz points out, this tradition was much older than the GDR, and was already current in some humanist circles in the late nineteenth century. Schulz admits that he had been highly influenced by Nazi propaganda. Once the war came to an end, he was urged by his mother to join the official communist organizations, including its trade union and its youth organization, the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (FDJ). It was within the structures of these organizations that Schulz was, in his own words, "converted". His memories of the time are evidence that this was not necessarily an easy task:

> And in those [socialist youth] clubs, there were wall posters. And I once wrote a wall poster about the Soviet soldiers who were building a monument in Treptow.[48] And at the time I wrote, I also kept this [wall poster], [I was] totally indignant… that the Soviets built a monument here in Germany. I then wrote, for instance, [that] "now every negro from Africa could come here and build his own monument." … So, that was … as an example of the ideology that we were taught [under Hitler].

Schulz' father died before the end of the war, and his mother was immediately recognized by the socialist authorities as falling into the category of people "persecuted by the Nazi regime". She was therefore entitled to priority housing, and this enabled the family to move back from Thuringia, where they had gone to evade the bombings, to Berlin. Here Schulz quickly joined the SED. From 1945 to 1948, he trained as a carpenter. In 1949 he was

[45] OKV Board Meeting, 12 December 2013.
[46] Dieter Becker and Siegfried Mechler (eds.), *Priester der Klio?: Neokonservativer Geschichtsklitterung Paroli bieten* (Berlin: Kai Homilius 2007); Klaus Blessing and Siegfried Mechler (eds.), *Es reicht: Zwanzig Jahre ausgeplündert, ausgegrenzt, ausgespäht* (Berlin: Verlag am Park 2010).
[47] Interview with Eberhard Schulz, 9 July 2012.
[48] This central Soviet war monument in Berlin Treptow was announced shortly after the end of the war and inaugurated in 1949.

admitted to the *Arbeiter-und Bauernfakultät* (ABF) to obtain his high-school degree. That the GDR offered him and other youngsters from poor families such educational opportunities is regarded by Schulz as an important testimony to the GDR's attempt at creating a socially just regime.

Being the oldest male in the household after the death of his father, the financial assistance provided by the state was an essential precondition for him to study. From 1952 to 1957, Eberhard Schulz studied philosophy at the Humboldt University. He then worked as an assistant teacher for the basic courses of Marxism-Leninism (*Marxistisch-Leninistisches Grundstudium*), and served as trade union and FDJ officer at the university.

In 1957, the MfS first contacted Eberhard Schulz. He was recruited to work in the Stasi's foreign service, the *Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung* (HV-A) as a contact man to several spies in the FRG. He would remain in this position until 1973, when he had to leave the department because, as he (rather evasively) calls it, he "did not agree with some things". When asked about this, he specifically mentioned that he could not condone the practice of using details from people's private lives, such as their homosexuality or extra-marital affairs, in order to pressure them into certain activities. He might have had personal reasons for rejecting this Stasi practice, since Schulz also admitted to have been notoriously unfaithful in several marriages himself. The Stasi of course demanded from its officers to live orderly lives as model socialist citizens, and any secret service will take care that its agents cannot be blackmailed by the enemy side.

Schulz was then demoted into the Ministry of Culture, where as a special operations officer (*Offizier im Besonderen Einsatz*, OiBE) he was responsible for clearing administrative hurdles for cultural groups that were to perform abroad. According to Schulz, however, after several years in this function his frustration over his "boring and stupid" tasks grew large enough to personally request dismissal, which he was indeed granted in 1983. Spurred by his own cultural hobbies, in particular the writing of theatre plays and (philosophical) novels, Schulz then decided to embark on a career as freelance writer, which, however, soon came to an end due a lack of income to support his second wife, whom he married in 1982, and her children. From the mid-1980s until 1990, he worked again at the Humboldt University as a coach to student culture groups. In the wake of the university's reorganization after unification, and aware of the problems that his past work for the Stasi entailed in the new political setting, he requested to be granted early retirement as soon as possible. "Then my professional life was over, and I started writing".

When I interviewed him in 2012, Eberhard Schulz was still an active man, now living with his third wife in Berlin. He also remained a convinced communist, despite his doubts about some of the methods used by the MfS. Schulz did not leave the SED, and then became a member of its successor party PDS. Yet in 2002 he left the party out of dissatisfaction with their activities in the governing coalition of Berlin, and because the party was "becoming too differentiated". Looking for a more firmly communist party, Schulz then briefly joined the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschland* (KPD), which had been formed by dissatisfied members of the SED unwilling to go along with the new line that was taken at the special party congress of November 1989. Yet he eventually left this party as well because, in Schulz' words, "they are a bit too dogmatic". The dogmatism of the KPD includes, amongst other things, their refusal to criticize Stalinism. It is remarkable that this would have surprised Schulz, as this was, in fact, one of the reasons why the party was founded in the first place.[49] Schulz now remains active as a board member in the cultural *Ernst Busch Gesellschaft* (named after a well-known socialist artist who produced lots of popular communist songs for the GDR). He is also involved in the human rights workgroup of the GBM, which he first contacted when writing a book about human dignity (*Menschenwürde*). Human dignity, Schulz remains convinced, can best be safeguarded by a socialist system. When I talked to him Schulz expressed his hope that socialism would soon return, and was convinced that this future socialism should come in the form of a strong state with centralized institutions, as a requirement to win the struggle against capitalism. Paradoxically, while being rather critical of Stasi intrusion in private lives, Schulz was also the person interviewed that was least prone to even consider systemic changes compared to socialism as it had existed in the GDR. By 2012, he saw the main hope for the future in the rise of Latin American socialist states.

Hereditary communist: Matthias Werner (VVN/*Heideruh*)

Even though Matthias Werner[50] was born in 1946, his story too began with the war. Werner's father was a communist who was first imprisoned under Hitler, and later managed to flee (on a train that he worked on) to Italy. As an old communist, Werner's father would become one

[49] The SED special congress of November 1989 called for an "irrevocable break with Stalinism as a system". This formula has ever since been disputed by communist hardliners in- and outside of the party; they see it as an unjustified admittance of socialist wrongs in general, and of SED guilt in particular. Michael Schumann, "Wir brechen unwiderruflich mit dem Stalinismus als System! Referat auf dem Außerordentlichen Parteitag der SED in Berlin am 16. Dezember 1989". Printed in a collection of Schumann's speeches by Wolfram Adolphi (ed.): Michael Schumann, *Hoffnung PDS. Reden Aufsätze, Entwürfe 1989-2000* (Berlin: Dietz 2004), pp. 33-56.
[50] Interview with Matthias Werner, 8 May 2015.

of the new cadres that built up the GDR. He was also recognized by the Soviet authorities as someone "persecuted by the Nazi regime". Werner thus grew up as a child of the new communist elite of the GDR – something that he was acutely aware of. According to Werner, when he grew up his father was both "a source of pride" and somehow "a burden" to him: he always felt how difficult it was to live up to his father's role model.

As part of the socialist establishment, Werner's youth was largely structured by the GDR's organizations. He "of course" joined the pioneers and later became active in the FDJ, first at his high school and then at the place of his apprenticeship (*Lehrarbeit*). As soon as he was eighteen, Werner applied for party membership, and after the mandatory year-long trial period he was admitted to the SED. In good socialist fashion, from this point on his career was defined by party instructions. For a long time he worked in the planning department of the *Ernst Thälmann-Werk* in Magdeburg[51] and also became the FDJ secretary of this huge factory complex. As he was a party member, the Thälmann Factory party branch then sent him to study first at a party school in Magdeburg, and subsequently at the Academy of Sciences in Berlin, where he would obtain a doctoral degree:

> And of course I seized this opportunity with both hands. For who would ever get the chance to obtain a full PhD position … which is even well-paid?

Yet this is not as self-evident as it seems, for going to Berlin to obtain a PhD also meant leaving behind his wife along with their two young kids. Although Werner was arguably the person interviewed who talked most of his family, and definitely of the men I interviewed, for him, too, it was completely self-evident that one must obey any Party orders, regardless of the personal consequences. His wife, formerly working as a midwife, completely shared his political convictions, including as to this issue of obedience. According to Matthias Werner, they "share the same basic attitude (*Grundhaltung*)". Werner attributes this to the fact that his wife's parents were also committed GDR citizens, even if they "were not antifascists" (that is to say, they were not *old* communists). Their political integration in the new state seems to have functioned rather well, and his father-in-law worked first at a *Kreisbezirk* (in the city of Brandenburg) and later at the Central Committee. After obtaining his PhD, Matthias Werner worked in several party functions, including at the *Ernst Thälmann-Werk* in Magdeburg again, in the *Stadtbezirksleitung Magdeburg Südost*, and at the Academy of Sciences. In 1988

[51] A factory producing heavy machinery (*Schwermaschinenbau-Kombinat*).

he became the sector head of heavy machine building in the Department of Machine Building and Metallurgy of the Central Committee of the SED.

With the fall of the GDR, Werner's career at the Central Committee came to an abrupt end. After shortly working in job creation schemes for the unemployed, he followed an "adaptation-course for *Ost*-academicians at the Freie Universität in West Berlin". According to Werner this was in fact

> an agency … for propaganda work, East-propaganda work. Yes, they propagated the bourgeois rule of law and the free democratic constitutional order.

Eventually he set up a small management consultancy, together with a friend. Currently, Matthias Werner is retired – yet very busy with his activities for the OKV and several of its organizations.

As a veteran communist imprisoned under Hitler, Werner's father had been a member of the *Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes* ("Union of the Persecuted by the Nazi Regime", VVN), and, after this organization was dissolved in East Germany in 1953, of the official Committee of Antifascist Resistance Fighters in the GDR (*Komitee der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer in der DDR;* KdAW). Werner strongly identified with the antifascist cause, and considered it especially important to pay full respect to those who

> more or less saved the honour of the German people … by fighting the Nazis from the very first day.

When in 1990 the KdAW was dissolved and succeeded by IV VdN, a more inclusive organization that accepted as members also people who had not personally fought or been persecuted, Werner became active as well.[52] In 2002, the two East German organizations of antifascists merged with the West German VVN, which had continued to exist after 1953. Via this road, in 2005 Werner established contacts with the people running *Heideruh* – an "antifascist holiday home" located in Buchholz near Hamburg, that is, in the former western part of Germany.[53] Reflecting the ageing organization's dire need of healthy volunteers, and tying in with Werner's socialist understanding of taking on whatever job required, he soon became active on the board of *Heideruh,* which was the "first West German organization to

[52] See alo chapter three, pp. 139-140.

[53] *Heideruh* was established in 1945 as a location where veteran communists could enjoy affordable holidays and recuperate from their ordeals under Nazism. Currently, the location is open for individual travelers, but mainly hosts leftist political and cultural groups for camps and trainings. For more information, see chapter 3, and www.heideruh.de.

join the OKV". In December 2013, Werner was elected president of the OKV umbrella, replacing Siegfried Mechler.

Of the people interviewed, Matthias Werner was the person most preoccupied with the political processes taking place within *Die Linke* and other left parties and organizations in unified Germany. In the first decade after 1989 he was still very active for the PDS. He left the party in 2002 out of dissatisfaction with its leadership, yet he remained convinced of the necessity to maintain good contacts with it. Werner was also clearly up-to-date regarding the debates that go on in *Die Linke*. Thus, he took the time to meticulously put all his arguments against *Die Linke*'s "theory of transformation" (*Transformationstheorie*) on the table. In short, Werner argued that with the theory of transformation the party failed "to ask the fundamental question of political power", and therefore is doomed to fail. With a quote from Tucholsky's 1926 poem that mocked the Social Democratic Party, for Werner the *Transformationstheorie* was a "*bescheidenes Radieschen*" (that is, red from the outside, but white from the inside), and thus *social democratic* in essence; this was obviously not meant as a compliment.[54] More than any of the others I interviewed, he was also convinced not only of the necessity, but of the possibility of attracting new groups with younger members to the OKV. Despite the general openness, however, his discussions of left politics and antifascism also made clear how much he is invested in the OKV understanding of history and ideology – along GDR lines.

OKV sympathizer: Monika Albrink

Monika Albrink[55] was born in 1944 as the youngest of four sisters. She grew up in a small village on the east bank of the Müritz (eastern Germany). While her father remained in Soviet custody as a prisoner of war for several years after the end of World War II, Monika's mother was offered a piece of land during the 1949 land reform. According to Monika, she initially believed this to have been an act of grace on the part of the new government, but later came to realize that they "paid back for the land more than enough" due to the hard labour the entire

[54] Kurt Tucholsky, *Feldfrüchte* (1926): "*Bonzen, Brillen, Gehberockte, / Parlamentsroutinendreh ... / Ja, und hier –? Die ganz verbockte / liebe gute SPD. // Hermann Müller, Hilferlieschen / blühn so harmlos, doof und leis / wie bescheidene Radieschen: / außen rot und innen weiß.*" – For more information on the debates about the *Transformationstheorie* in *Die Linke*, see Amieke Bouma, "Ideological Confirmation and Party Consolidation: Germany's Die Linke and the Financial and Refugee Crises". In: Luke March and Dan Keith (eds.), *Europe's Radical Left. From Marginality to the Mainstream?* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International 2016), pp. 133-154.

[55] Interview with Monika Albrink, 9 July 2012.

family was forced to perform to meet the production quotas. In 1953, facing the forced collectivization of agricultural production, Monika's father moved the family to a city "for the girls to have a future". He became a teacher at the college for agricultural engineering (*Agraringenieurschule*) in Biendorf. Monika's mother started a career as children's tutor, and later obtained a state diploma in Pedagogy.

Through the new occupation of Monika's father, the family now became part of the (new) intelligentsia. Monika Albrink argued that, although her father obviously worked for a state educational facility, this change in status declassified Monika and her sisters from the beneficial status of having a proletarian background, and caused the authorities to be more suspicious of the family. Thus, Monika had to give up her plans to take part in the Protestant confirmation ceremony, as this religious ritual would have cast doubts on her parents' ability to provide their children with a socialist upbringing. Albrink was also the last of her class to be granted the right to pass her high school graduation (*Abitur*) – despite having been the best pupil of her class. Nevertheless, Monika claimed she does not remember this period as being harsh or unjust, and maintained that she never felt pressured into anything. With hindsight, we cannot check whether this is true; but from the above we may conclude that she did, in fact, feel pressured *out* of things. Nevertheless, the apparent suspicion of the state towards her parents (and, by extension, towards her) did not prevent her from seeking integration into the structures of the state.

Albrink went on to study Textiles and Chemical Technology, and afterwards found a job in the textile industry in Plauen. In her spare time, she enjoyed building remote-controlled model cars. Initially this was a private hobby, although she did travel to Czechoslovakia to see race games and to buy new models, especially from Italy. Her wish to participate in these games then made her set up the GDR's society for model building of remote-controlled autos and motors at the Society for Sport and Technology (*Gesellschaft für Sport und Technik*, GST), because, in line with the GDR's penchant for "organizing" its citizens, this was the only way to get permission to take part in international competitions (albeit confined to the socialist space). The GST was a paramilitary organization designed to attract young people to the NVA and recruit them. Young people interested in electricity and with skills in building remote-controlled cars were definitely of interest to the military.

Albrink would remain in Plauen until 1980, when she moved to Berlin to her husband. One year later they had a daughter. Albrink stayed home for three years, and then started a new job in a research and development company specialized in safety helmets. She remained

there until the company was dissolved ("unwound", *abgewickelt*) in 1990. Afterwards, she worked at a newly opened "Metro" supermarket, which she described as the most horrible time of her life. This was an unskilled job that she got because she was quick-mouthed – but it was also a job that could have been performed by anyone. Her employer felt the same, and she was convinced that, although she sold enough, she would have been fired if she had not enjoyed legal protection as the elected representative of the company's employees. In 1996 Albrink became disabled through a traffic accident. Although the trauma was severe, Albrink with hindsight called this accident her "rescue". Now officially unable to work, she threw herself into painting, and led weekly therapeutic painting sessions at the local association for disabled persons; this activity she still continued when I met her in 2012.

From these accounts we see that Monika Albrink was critical of several episodes in the history of the GDR. Unlike others interviewed, she did not feel supported by the state in her educational development (although at one point she mentioned that she did obtain a scholarship based on her high university grades). Yet although she maintained that not everything in the GDR was right, she was angry about the way the GDR is now depicted in official discourse. In the GDR, so Albrink, you were able to speak your mind much more than people dared to. She gave several examples of this, mainly from her husband who refused to join the army and "taught [her] a lot when it comes to being critical":

> So, I have to say, at the time… we were doing fine. And I also have to say, I learned a lot from my husband. When I first met him, I said, "What? You are not in the German-Soviet Friendship [Organization]?" From Plauen, I didn't know otherwise [than that all were members]. You went [to work] in the enterprise, you were in the union… like they were in the [Nazi girls' league] BDM before, you were now in the … somewhere. You were organized. No, I said, [you say you are] not in the German-Soviet Friendship, I do not believe you. It's true, he said. And [he said] I also didn't join the army. Now that I really didn't believe. No, he said, no. […]

He was told to report, and found fit for service:

> But, he said, you know, as a pupil, I distributed leaflets that said "guns to plowshares" [*Gewehre zu Pflugscharen*] and such things, and now I should join the army? I won't do it! And that is how it went.

> And he was… in any case, a person, a very straight person, and almost a fanatic when it came to fairness. And this is how he shaped me… And our daughter as well, of course, and… Actually, we also didn't really fit in here [in the GDR] anymore. Neither [then] in the one system, nor now in this [system]…

While Albrink thus acknowledged her unease with living under the GDR's political regime, she was convinced that the situation back then compared favorably to that of today. As an example, Albrink raised the question of how much freedom there is to speak up in unified Germany, especially when considering the position of employees. In this particular episode, Albrink first recalled people's reactions when Honecker's car convoy passed through her street, and compared the previous fear of Honecker to post-*Wende* workers' fear of capitalist company bosses:

> The street would be cordoned off half an hour in advance. And everyone would just wait. And then my husband said one day, so, and now we simply cross. [The officer called:] "Citizens! Stand still!" But he just continued walking. And after he continued walking, all the others crossed as well. And before the officer could do anything about that, everyone was long gone. So he didn't have to write a protocol [about the incident] either. But before Honecker was there, everyone was long gone. So, they really could have saved themselves this [waiting]. But… They must have felt fear. Exaggerated [fear]. But… still not more than today. Today they [the people] also have fear. The difference is back then… when you talked badly about the Party and the government, that could cause one… one could have disadvantages. Be assigned a worse job, for instance. And later I thought… *pff*…. when I now speak badly about [Chancellor] Kohl[56]… *pff*… I can do this as much as I want. Or… nobody even notices. But if I say something [negative] about my boss… I will lose my job. And with that, my [basis for] existence! We had our hearts on our sleeves, we could say everything, back then… As long as it was nothing political. Everyone knew everything about everyone [*jeder von jedem alles*], you really couldn't fool each other, we were all in the same boat [laughs]. But later… after the *Wende*… also, in the company, you could do nothing. And, we really had some cracks for bosses, but… he was the boss, whether that was justified or not but… he had the power!

She said never to have had any fears in the GDR, even though she knows the Stasi produced a large file on her. Although she knew her mail was opened, she decided not to take a look into her file to discover what information was in fact collected. She assumed the MfS was mainly interested in her because of her function in the GST.

The story of Albrink is instructive, for it poses a counter-example to the dominant narrative within the OKV. It may very well be that Monika Albrink is not a member of the OKV for exactly this reason, despite her contacts with the GBM, including through exhibiting her work in the GBM gallery. Yet it gives an insight into the considerations of those who sympathize with the OKV. While she is quite critical about some aspects of life in the GDR,

[56] Helmut Kohl (CDU) was chancellor first of the FRG, and later of unified Germany, from 1982 until 1998.

Monika Albrink nevertheless felt more at home in the former state than she does in unified Germany:

> And now, after the *Wende*, when some from over there [West Germany] want to tell us afterwards how we lived. And what we should have done differently… *Mensch*, yes, afterwards one is always smarter. But when you were somehow caught in the machine… One had to see how one progressed. And… I mean, [a person] who… didn't do anything that was forbidden also really did get further. He had all chances. I mean, he was supported [to study], he could study whatever he wanted… Not always, I also wanted to study something different [than I did]. But anyhow, you could always study, and I also thought, if I want [to do] something else later, I can always reorient myself and… *pff*… Principally, when you can read, and there were really enough libraries, then you can always develop yourself …

Hers is not a story of someone who simply conformed; rather, Albrink sought ways to engage with the socialist system that would suit her personal agenda, and when I talked to her she made the impression that she was satisfied with her achievements. In 1989 the state that she had come to live with in a symbiosis of accommodation disappeared, and so did the life that she had led. Albrink was especially appalled by the working conditions "under capitalism", which she felt had made her a completely interchangeable employee. The impression she evoked was that the hyper-individualized system of capitalism deprived Monika Albrink of her individuality, a quality that she in fact valued highly.

II: Analysis of the (auto-)biographies

A coherent age cohort

In general, the OKV activists I interviewed were born between the late 1920s and the mid-1940s. The oldest person I interviewed was Hans Modrow (born 1928), a senior SED/PDS/*Die Linke* politician who serves as a bridge between OKV and *Die Linke*, as we will see in chapter five. Only few of my interlocutors were born after the end of World War II. These people can be seen as exceptions, and they usually joined the OKV out of particular personal or family ties to the GDR.[57]

[57] Thus, Wolf Stötzel is part of OKV-near VVN-BdA member organization *LAG Buchenwald-Dora* because his father had been active in the communist resistance and was interned in the Nazi concentration camp (interview; 27 November 2013), and Dieter Feuerstein was active in the GBM as well as in the group of former *Kundschafter des Friedens* primarily because of his background as Stasi spy in West Germany (interview; 13 June 2012). The one person who really does not fit this muster is Max Renkl, a communist who was born in Munich in the 1970s and who now heads the *Freundeskreis Ernst Thälmann Gedenkstätte Ziegenhals (FETG)* from Berlin. What he does share with other OKV members is a firm attachment to the GDR's narrative of anti-fascism, and to the celebration of old KPD heroes (such as Ernst Thälmann). That he is indeed understood to be

Representatives of different organizations admitted that their entire membership base is of an advanced age. Most members of the OKV member organization GBM come from the generation that was born between 1925 and 1935, and we must assume that this also holds true for OKV as a whole. According to GBM board member Ernst Jager, in 2012 only 15% of the membership base of the GBM still consisted of people younger than 78 years (that is, born after 1935). Around 70% of the members was between 78 and 87 years old, whereas another 15% was older than 87 (and thus born before 1926). In Jager's words: "We are all old. Old, older, oldest."[58] The only exceptions to this rule are the very few OKV members born after World War II. Representatives of this younger generation often have fathers who joined the KPD before 1933, and therefore grew up as the children of celebrated "antifascist heroes" who were part of the new elite. The activists in leading functions are also slightly younger than the OKV's average members, obviously because the organization work requires physical fitness. Matthias Werner (b. 1946) repeatedly joked that he was elected to the position of OKV president in December 2013 mainly because he was "the youngest" of all possible candidates – a remark that is probably not far from the truth.[59]

The organizations' difficulties in attracting younger members are a point of concern for activists, and some even spoke of their possible collapse for "biological reasons",[60] i.e. the loss of members who are deceased is not compensated with new and younger members. This lack of younger members can be explained by the nature of the organizations: in order to have experienced the GDR as one's political homeland, and to have served its state and party, one needed to be at least of adult age by 1989. And the more prestigious the post one held, the more likely that one was already of advanced age. This is an important factor, because especially the bigger organizations which are part of the OKV are structured around the interests of mainly such higher-ranking officials.[61] Arguably, younger people will also have had more flexibility to adapt ideologically. At the same time, people who were still young in the early 1990s had a greater need, and opportunity, to reshape their life according to the new

somewhat of an anomaly because of his age can be seen from Siegfried Mechler's insistence that I should definitely speak with Renkl – precisely because he was so young.

[58] "Wir sind alle alt. Alt, älter, älterster." Interview with Ernst Jager, 6 August 2013.

[59] Interview with Matthias Werner, 8 May 2015. Werner was elected OKV president after Siegfried Mechler retired from this position during the OKV's bi-annual board meeting in December 2013. This was a purely pro-forma matter, as there were no other candidates for the position (OKV board meeting, 12 December 2013). Several activists I spoke with also admitted that it was hard to fill vacant positions because a large part of the membership of their organizations was no longer available for this due to old age and declining health.

[60] Interviews with Wolfgang Schmidt (12 June 2012); Hans Bauer and Dieter Stiebert (14 June 2012); and Siegfried Mechler (12 July 2012).

[61] But not exclusively, of course. An important exception here are the support activities of the GRH for "normal" or low-level border guards who were charged with manslaughter. Clearly, however, also these people are deeply implicated with the GDR's politics – and especially with its darker sides.

"rules" of the FRG, and were less likely to voluntarily associate themselves with the fallen state.

Conversion narratives and social mobility

The age cohort born between 1925 and 1935 that provides the bulk of OKV members is commonly referred to as the Hitler Youth generation.[62] They experienced first-hand the atrocities and chaos of war, and the destabilizing effect of German defeat. While the oldest members of this generation were sent to the front themselves, many others experienced that their fathers did not return from war or returned many years later as broken men. Antifascist slogans resonated with a public exhausted by war, loss, and deprivation. Socialist slogans of building up a new, antifascist country fed into the immediate needs of rebuilding the post-war landscape. Benita Blessing, in her monograph *The Antifascist Classroom*, describes how the school system was reformed by so-called *Neulehrer* ("new teachers"), many of them socialists and social democrats who sincerely believed in the new antifascist state.[63] And as Liesbeth van de Grift demonstrates, a huge amount of antifascist committees and workers' councils sprang up in the Soviet zone; this even surprised the authorities in Moscow, and prompted them to allow for the establishment of political parties earlier than initially planned.[64]

Importantly, the antifascist doctrine propagated in the Soviet zone put the blame for Nazi atrocities fully on the former state leadership.[65] This made it possible for a large part of the population to start with a clean slate, provided they now supported the antifascist efforts.

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[62] The Hitler Youth generation has been differently defined by different authors. Some see front experience as characteristic for this generation, and define its members as German males born between 1922 and 1930. See for a more thorough discussion Gabriele Rosenthal (ed.), *Die Hitlerjugend-Generation: biographische Thematisierung als Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Essen: Die Blaue Eule 1986). In *Deutsche Karrieren. Lebenskonstruktionen sozialer Aufsteiger aus der Flakhelfer-Generation* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1987), Heinz Bude concentrated on an even smaller age cohort of those born between 1926 and 1930. Catherine Epstein, who is looking at East Germany, talks about a generation that was "roughly born between 1925 and 1935" (*The Last Revolutionaries*, p. 227).

[63] Benita Blessing, *The Antifascist Classroom: Denazification in Soviet-occupied Germany, 1945-1949* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2006); esp. pp. 31-35; 45-47.

[64] Liesbeth van de Grift, *Voorwaarts en Vergeten. De Overgang van Fascisme naar Communisme in Oost-Europa, 1944-1948* (Amsterdam: Ambo Anthos 2010), p. 46.

[65] According to the 1935 definition of Georgi Dimitroff (a Bulgarian communist who was the general-secretary of the Komintern from 1935 until 1943, and who in 1946 became the prime minister of Bulgaria), that remained in place throughout the communist period, fascism in power was "the open terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic, most imperialistic elements of the monetary capital". Dimitroff's thesis furthermore held that "bourgeois democracy" and fascism are both manifestations of capitalism, because both have the same economic basis. Once capitalism is endangered, bourgeois democracy will turn into a fascist dictatorship that will try to keep the capitalist order intact by means of brutal force. This thesis is also known as the "Dimitroff-Thesis". Cited by Jan-Herman Brinks, "On Victors, Victims and Totalitarianism". In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 42(3) (2007), pp. 545-554; here p. 551.

For these reasons, the antifascist doctrine has also been described as the GDR's "foundation myth":[66] It provided East Germans with a new ideology which they could embrace in order to be morally good citizens after the scathing experience of WWII. As fascism was explained as an outgrowth of capitalism, the antifascist ideology furthermore provided legitimacy for expropriations of companies and properties, as well as for the land reforms. This could be done without direct recourse to communist rhetoric that would have alienated parts of the population.[67]

The credibility of the antifascist state ideology was also enhanced by the earlier role of the communists as one of the main groups of organized resistance to the Nazi regime. As the propagation of antifascist ideals in the GDR was coupled with a condemnation of the personnel continuation in the state structures of the FRG and of capitalism, antifascism also provided a basis for the belief in the *moral* superiority of the socialist German state – and of its veteran communist leaders.[68]

The SED's offer of a "conversion out of disappointment" turned the East German population from losers into "winners of history", through a mere act of will (or, in communist terms, "consciousness"). This was highly attractive to the generation we are considering here.[69] As Christoph Classen has argued, the antifascist narrative of struggle and victory, of suffering and salvation, was the "ideal, quasi-religious myth", and it "corresponded with their own ascension experience … that was also firmly tied to Party and state."[70] Moreover, tying in their lives in with the antifascist narrative "gave [their lives] a transcendental meaning that went beyond the individual [*im überindividuellen Sinn*], [a meaning] which they could not generate by themselves".[71]

Perhaps because they themselves had lacked the opportunity or stamina to reject Nazism, members of the Hitler Youth generation were now ready to respect the antifascist credentials of veteran communists. To many of them, old communists functioned as

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[66] Alan L. Nothnagle, *Building the East-German Myth: Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1999); Jan-Herman Brinks, "Political Anti-Fascism in the German Democratic Republic". In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 32(2) (1997), pp. 207-217.

[67] Rüdiger Schmidt, "Sieger der Geschichte? Antifaschismus im 'anderen Deutschland'". In: Thomas Großbölting (ed.), *Friedensstaat, Leseland, Sportnation? DDR Legenden auf dem Prüfstand* (Berlin: Ch. Links 2009), pp. 208-229; here p. 212.

[68] Schmidt, "Sieger der Geschichte? ", p. 209.

[69] Christoph Classen, "Faschismus und Antifaschismus in der Geschichtskultur der frühen DDR". In: Heiner Timmerman (eds.), *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Europa im 20. Jahrhundert*, volume 1 (Berlin: Verlag Dr. W. Hopf 2010), pp. 23-42; here p. 40.

[70] Classen, "Faschismus und Antifaschismus in der Geschichtskultur der frühen DDR", p. 40.

[71] Ibid., pp. 40-41.

charismatic mentors and leaders – often in contrast to their own fathers, who were criticized for not having resisted Hitler.[72] No wonder then that many OKV activists whom I interviewed started with their "conversion" to socialism in the aftermath of World War II, and used this conversion narrative as the starting point for a story of personal political engagement combined with educational and professional success. The few people from among my conversation partners who grew up in communist families likewise started with stories of war disruption, and combined their reflections on socialist state-building with memories of personal achievements. They differed from other respondents, however, in the central place that their parents occupied in their respective narratives: especially fathers who had been active in the resistance tended to be heroized. Moreover, their narratives of personal careers reflected the social privileges and ideological responsibilities connected to being a part of what one may call the "socialist hereditary elite".[73]

Indeed, this group's affection toward the state was greatly fostered by the state-facilitated social mobility that this group experienced in the 1950s and 1960s.[74] The mobility of this generation was particularly high because previous generations had been diminished by the war, and were viewed with suspicion due to their earlier support for Hitler. The GDR's destruction of the old German *Junker* class of aristocratic landholders, combined with the state's particular promotion of youngsters from working-class milieus, further contributed to the steep social climbing of this age cohort.[75]

This is reflected in the family backgrounds of the OKV activists I briefly presented above. In almost all cases, their parents did not enjoy any secondary education before the war.[76] Before being drafted into the German army or being arrested as communists, fathers were generally employed as manual laborers or craftsmen,[77] whereas mothers either did not work at all or were employed in jobs that did not require professional skills. Yet in the post-war period, their children managed to work their way up through the education system of the

[72] Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, pp. 227-228.
[73] See especially the life story of Matthias Werner sketched above. The same counts for other sons of old communists, including Wolf Stötzel (27 November 2013) and other members of the *LAG Buchenwald-Dora* (conversation, 14 December 2013).
[74] Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, p. 227.
[75] Ibid., p. 132.
[76] The exception being Monika Albrink, whose father however enjoyed the educational upward mobility of the young GDR by getting a degree in agriculture (*Diplomwirt*). Ironically, exactly this meant for Monika's family the end of their preferential status as proletarians or peasants.
[77] To mention a few examples; Holfert's father was a slater; Denner's father worked in a cigarette factory; Wegerer's was plumber; Schulz's was typesetter; Mechler's father was bus driver.

GDR. Often, this became possible due to the special state sponsorship of children from lower-class families.[78]

Several OKV activists obtained their entrance qualification for university through studies at an *Arbeiter- und Bauernfakultät* ("Workers and Peasants' Faculty", ABF) that did not require formal high school diplomas for entry, and which prepared for university study. Such ABFs were established at all universities and higher educational institutions (*Hochschulen*) throughout the GDR in 1949, in order to "break the education monopoly of the higher classes".[79] This was an affirmative action program[80] to benefit children of "workers and peasants", the alleged beneficiaries and pillars of the GDR as the "Workers and Peasants' State".[81] Upon finishing their studies, these people were highly sought after to fill the many vacant positions in the party and state apparatus. This also particularly holds true for the newly established GDR armed forces, which aimed to include as few people tainted with Nazi military experience as possible,[82] and at the same time sought to exclude old communists with a past independent from that of the new SED leadership.[83]

Special efforts were made to draw women into higher education;[84] after going through a vocational training they had a chance to enter university. OKV activists Margitta Mechler and

[78] Both men and women profited from such state support, although their career trajectories were usually shaped differently.

[79] "(1946 - 1962) Eine neue Zugangsbedingung zur Universität - Die Arbeiter- und Bauernfakultät". In: Ausstellungsgruppe an der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin und Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Frauenforschung (ed.), *Von der Ausnahme zur Alltäglichkeit: Frauen an der Berliner Universität Unter den Linden* (Berlin 2003); Table 19. Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www2.gender.hu-berlin.de/ausstellung/pdf-Dateien/Tafel19g.pdf. When recalling his educational career, Siegfried Mechler used the exact same phrase (interview with Siegfried Mechler, 12 July 2012).

[80] On the use of the term "affirmative action program" with regard to socialist Eastern Europe, see Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2001).

[81] The ABFs would remain until 1962/63, when they became obsolete due to the improvement in general education opportunities for children of lower-class families, especially via the "Oberschule" (higher secondary school). The ABFs were also intended to produce a loyal and educated class of SED party cadres, a goal that was only partly reached. According to Ingrid Miethe, less than half of the ABF students from 1949 to 1951 were members of the SED, and later this percentage would only drop. Ingrid Miethe, "'Die Universität dem Volke!' Entwicklungsphasen der Arbeiter-und-Bauern-Fakultäten (ABF) der DDR". In: *Beiheft zum Report: Erwachsenenbildung und Demokratie* 1(2003), pp. 215-224; here pp. 220; 218.

[82] Although setting up armed forces without people trained in the Nazi period proved undoable in the end, political loyalty was much more important than previous military training, or even suitability for the new job. See Liesbeth van de Grift, *Voorwaarts en Vergeten.*

[83] Thus, many loyal communists who had been part of the "wrong" KPD faction, or who had fought in the Partisan War in Yugoslavia during the Second World War, were also excluded from MfS service. Roger Engelmann "Der DDR-Staatssicherheitsdienst – Vorgeschichte, Gründung, Selbstverständnis", lecture at the workshop *60 Jahre Gründung der Bezirks-U-Haftanstalten der Staatssicherheit* (Erfurt, 5 November 2012).

[84] Big exceptions here were the officer schools of the armed forces, where women were hardly present. In general, this had to do with the underrepresentation of women in the armed forces. The MfS has been described by several scholars as a highly patriarchal male stronghold. See e.g. Gary Bruce, *The Firm: The Inside Story of*

Gertrud Fischer both studied at the Economics department of the HU in the early 1960s, and made careers in the realm of economics.[85] Continued specialization was furthermore stimulated by the different opportunities for part-time education, which allowed young mothers in particular (who were expected to return to work as soon as their youngest child turned three) to study and take up a profession. Accordingly, Hildegard Müller began her career only after her youngest enrolled in day care, and she later studied through correspondence courses (*Fernstudium*), as the opportunity of further training during worktime.[86] Brigitta Wegerer initially left school after grade eight; her mother was convinced that it was better to first learn a trade. In 1956 Wegerer started an in-company training as an industrial clerk for three years, and afterwards she went on to evening school to obtain an entrance degree for technical college (*Fachhochschulreife*). She continued her education specializing as an Engineer-Economist (*Ingenieur-Ökonom*) at the college of Railway Engineering in Dresden. This college was directly linked to the GDR's railway company, the *Reichsbahn*. In line with expectations, this is also where Frau Wegerer made her career.[87]

It is for this reason that this age cohort has also been called "the generation of social upward mobility" (*Aufsteigergeneration*). Lutz Niethammer, who conducted many interviews with representatives of this generation, concludes that "[d]espite much criticism of the specifics" of life in the GDR, this cohort "remains attached to a system that offered them experiences of accomplishment, responsibility and also power that their fathers had been denied."[88]

This contrasts markedly with the generation born already in the GDR (the *Hineingeborenen),* whose careers started in the 1970s and 1980s when the GDR leadership became more atrophied. For them, the point of comparison had inevitably shifted from the lived experience of the Third Reich to contemporary developments in the neighbouring FRG. Consequently, this generation felt substantially less attachment to the state.[89] This distinction is also supported by Karl Mannheim's theory of generations, which holds that the social and political events that take place in a generation's formative years shape this generation, and as

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the Stasi (Oxford 2010); Jens Gieseke, *Die hauptamtlichen Mitarbeiter der Staatssicherheit. Personalstruktur und Lebenswelt 1950–1989/90* (Berlin: BStU 2000).

[85] Interview with Margitta Mechler and Gertrud Fischer, 13 June 2012.

[86] Hildegard Müller, in: Collective interview with the friends of Gertrud Fischer, 12 July 2012.

[87] Brigitta Wegerer, in: Collective interview with the friends of Gertrud Fischer, 12 July 2012.

[88] Lutz Niethammer, "Das Volk der DDR und die Revolution. Versuch einer historischen Wahrnehmung der laufenden Ereignisse". In: Charles Schüddekopf (ed.), *"Wir sind das Volk". Flugschriften, Anrufe und Texte einer deutschen Revolution* (Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag 1990), pp. 251-279; here p. 258.

[89] See also Steven Pfaff, *Exit-Voice Dynamics and the Collapse of East Germany. The Crisis of Leninism and the Revolution of 1989* (Durham: Duke University Press 2006), pp. 47-48.

such set each age cohort apart from those preceding and following them, while at the same time shaping the events that will become formative for the subsequent generations.[90] These observations also vindicate the conclusions of Schuman and Scott, who in 1989 asked representatives of different generations to rank historical events in terms of importance. Their conclusion was "that generational differences in memory are strong, that adolescence and early adulthood are indeed the primary periods for 'generational imprinting in the sense of political memories,' and that later memories can best be understood in terms of earlier experiences."[91]

As a result of their experiences when growing up, the Hitler Youth generation particularly valued the stability that the GDR offered them.[92] They are still acutely aware of, and grateful for, the chances they obtained despite their poor family background. These opportunities they might indeed not have enjoyed in West Germany at that time. It is thus no wonder that East German welfare provisions, including in education and pensions, and especially with an eye on affirmative action policies for people of working-class descent, take central place in their defence of the former socialist state. Politically, they continue to define the establishment of Soviet socialism on Eastern German territory as a logical outcome of German guilt for war atrocities, and socialism is described by this group in terms of redemption from fascism. Socially, the expansion of educational opportunities and the accompanying upward social mobility from the late 1940s to the early 1960s play an important role in their life stories. In contrast to later generations, this group continues to measure the achievements of East Germany against the situation in Weimar and Nazi Germany. Experiences in the early GDR also slip through in their reflections on political and social developments since 1990, and in their reflections on the German debate about GDR history.

[90] See Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations" (1928). Reprinted in: Paul Kecskemeti (ed.), *Karl Mannheim: Essays in the Sociology of Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1952), pp. 276-322.
[91] Olick and Robbins, "Social Memory Studies", p. 123. For the original study, see Howard Schuman and Jacqueline Scott, "Generations and Collective Memories". In: *American Sociological Review* 54 (1989), pp. 359-381.
[92] Dorothee Wierling also describes the sense of security that the GDR brought after the unsettling experiences of the Nazi period. To her interviewee, an SED party secretary born in 1929, the party provided a sense of meaning and direction "governed by … regularity, and clarity". He opposed this to "nature, at whose mercy he feels powerless". His fondness of regularity also explains why he saw the top-down structure of the SED as a blessing, and something people voluntary adhered to, rather than as undemocratic. See Dorothee Wierling, "A German Generation of Reconstruction: The Children of the Weimar Republic in the GDR". In: Luisa Passerini (ed.), *Memory and Totalitarianism* (3rd ed., New York: Oxford University Press 2009), pp. 71-88; here p.77-78.

The personal is political: on the arguments in OKV autobiographies

The OKV memory group's narrative defence of the GDR centers on two broader story lines: the historical and political conditions for the GDR's existence (and its demise), and the social conditions within the GDR. Arguments from these two fields are woven together in order to present the GDR as a legitimate attempt at creating a "better Germany", and its secret police as a historical necessity. These reflections often follow the perspective of official GDR historiography before 1989, as well as recurrent themes in the ongoing political debates on the legacy of the GDR.

Antifascism

Not surprisingly, all of the people interviewed were of the opinion that the GDR had numerous positive aspects which have been neglected in the discourse on the GDR as it developed since 1990. Strikingly, all interviewees started their narratives with the Nazi period to indicate their belief in, and commitment to, the antifascist doctrine of the GDR. This even goes for people who were too young to have witnessed World War II themselves; for them, the narratives of their lives started with the war activities of their fathers – whether in the service of Hitler or in the communist resistance – and even of their grandfathers. Antifascism was in turn often linked to the GDR's proclaimed *pacifist* doctrine, which derived from the special obligation to "prevent another war starting from German soil".[93]

Contrasting East German antifascism and pacifism to a recent "resurrection" of the German military, a substantial number of OKV activists explicitly pointed to the German involvement in the NATO military operations during the Bosnian War (1992-1995) and in Yugoslavia (Serbia) during the Kosovo war in 1999, which they saw as the first examples of German acts of military aggression after World War II. They emphasized that these had

[93] This was mentioned by, amongst others, Helmut Holfert (interview 10 July 2012); Eberhard Schulz (interview 9 July 2012); Siegfried Mechler (interview 12 July 2012); Margitta Mechler and Gertrud Fischer (interview 13 June 2012); Rudolf Denner (interview 10 July 2012); and Dieter Feuerstein (13 June 2012). When including indirect references to World War II and the importance of German pacifism, this list could be extended to include almost everybody I talked with. All people interviewed were furthermore convinced that the GDR had provided the conditions for German pacifism, and could therefore justly be described a "State of Peace" (*Friedensstaat*), as the official GDR formula had it. In the appeal published on the occasion of the GDR's 35th anniversary in 1984, the pacifist ideal of the state was formulated as follows: "*Das sozialistische Deutschland tritt als Staat des Friedens vom ersten Tage an für Abrüstung, Entspannung und friedliche Koexistenz, gegen einen neuen Krieg, gegen nuklearen Völkermord ein.*" Cited in Hermann Wentker, "Für Frieden und Völkerfreundschaft? Die DDR als internationaler Akteur." In: Thomas Großbölting (ed.), *Friedensstaat, Leseland, Sportnation? DDR Legenden auf dem Prüfstand* (Berlin: Ch. Links 2009), pp. 155-176; here p. 155.

become possible because the GDR had disappeared.[94] The GBM in particular was very active in condemning NATO engagement in Serbia, including in the organization of "war tribunals", and in supporting the citizens of Varvarin in their compensation claims against the German government. This view is in fact supported by broader radical left circles in Germany, and the PDS had been the only political party to actively oppose NATO actions in the former Yugoslavia in the run-up to the bombings.[95] Yet in 2001 the PDS withdrew its fundamental opposition against NATO when forming a coalition government with the SPD in Germany's capital city of Berlin. When the PDS leadership signed a coalition treaty which stated in its preamble that "we are part of the transatlantic community",[96] Rolf Berthold, Eberhard Rehling and Eberhard Schulz gave up their party membership.[97] As Berthold put it: "I will not join [them] in entering NATO".[98]

The argument that the GDR was historically necessary to avoid war can of course be doubted. In the above-mentioned case of the NATO military campaign against Serbia and Montenegro the argument would perhaps make more sense if it referred to the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, not to the GDR alone; and observers concur that the intervention was only possible because of Russia's weakness at the time.[99] Still, even in that form the argument boils down to condoning a Cold War scenario, in which "peaceful coexistence" (*friedliche Koexistenz*) ultimately results only from the threat of mutually assured destruction. This argument also conveniently neglects the several hot conflicts that indeed did take place during the Cold War, because the GDR (and the FRG) were never directly involved in these clashes.

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[94] Interviews with Dieter Feuerstein (11 July 2012), Siegfried Mechler (12 July 2012), Eberhard Schulz (9 July 2012), Rolf Berthold (7 November 2012), Anja and Bernd Mewes (8 August 2013), Gabrielle Senft (6 August 2013), Hans Modrow (26 November 2013).

[95] It can be argued that this view is not altogether incorrect, as far-reaching NATO activities became possible at least partly due to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and its block of satellite states. In this light, it is often suggested that with the disintegration of NATO's former "main enemy", the military alliance found a new reason and method to organize itself in the "peace-keeping missions" in the former Yugoslavia. See e.g. Celeste A. Wallander, "Institutional Assets and Adaptability: NATO after the Cold War". In: *International Organization* 54(4) (2000), pp. 705-735; here 717-720. In light of the geo-political implication of NATO involvement it can however be doubted in how far the GDR's pacifism was of any significance.

[96] This is Berthold's phrasing. In the actual preamble, it is stated as follows: "*Berlin repräsentiert eine der führenden Industrienationen der Welt, die in die westliche Wertegemeinschaft eingebunden ist, die der Organisation der Vereinten Nationen und dem nordatlantischen Bündnis angehört, die die Erweiterung der Europäischen Union anstrebt und die zahlreiche weitere internationale Verpflichtungen erfüllt*" (underlining mine). In: SPD and PDS, *Koalitionsvereinbarung zwischen der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands (SPD) Landesverband Berlin und der Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (PDS) Landesverband Berlin für die Legislaturperiode 2001-2006* (Berlin 2002), p. 5.

[97] Interviews with Eberhard Schulz (9 July 2012); Eberhard Rehling (9 November 2012) and Rolf Berthold (7 November 2012).

[98] "In die NATO trete ich nicht mit ein! – und so habe ich die Partei verlassen." Interview with Rolf Berthold, 7 November 2012.

[99] Michael Mandelbaum, "A Perfect Failure: NATO's War against Yugoslavia". In: *Foreign Affairs* 78: 5 (1999), pp. 2-8; here p. 7.

In particular, the argument that the GDR was a stabilizing factor in world politics is at odds with the fact that the GDR's foreign policy was completely dependent on the Soviet Union. In his article on GDR foreign policy, Hermann Wentker concludes that the main goal of the GDR was not so much to foster "peace and the friendship of peoples" (*Frieden und Völkerfreundschaft*), but rather to secure its own existence.[100]

Nevertheless, all respondents remained strongly attached to the antifascist and pacifist image of the GDR. For them, "the capitalist world" is the aggressor in the conflict between East and West. This perspective safeguards the GDR's moral superiority over the FRG and, by extension, the West in general.

Social mobility

Almost all of my informants mentioned in particular the *social mobility* in the GDR, especially regarding education and career perspectives. They were moreover acutely aware of their "good fortune" of having enjoyed these opportunities in spite of their poor, working-class family backgrounds.

As the driving forces of the OKV (including those whose autobiographies I presented above) are slightly younger than the average OKV members, their biographies did not include immediate front experience in World War II. But also for many of them, the war brought suffering and interrupted their school careers, as many primary schools closed in the period nearing and directly after the German defeat. Still younger people remember the dire situation of their schools in the first post-war years. Monika Albrink, born in 1944, recalls how all pupils in her Müritz village school still sat in the same hall, ordered in bench rows per class, with only one head teacher responsible for their education.[101] Helmut Holfert remembers the removal of "tainted" teachers too much implicated with the former regime, and their replacement by the "antifascist" *Neulehrer* who were "of varying quality."[102] Yet despite these obvious initial difficulties, education policies were successful in increasing access to schooling at different levels, as the seven biographies above make clear.

Generally speaking, interviewees often used stories of their personal achievements in the GDR as an introduction to longer explanations about the current situation of employees in Germany. Male interviewees seemed above all intent to talk about their personal careers;

[100] Wentker, "Für Frieden und Völkerfreundschaft? ", p. 174.
[101] Interview with Monika Albrink, 9 July 2012. The family of Monika Albrink would later move to the small city of Biendorf (ca. 13.000 inhabitants), where, according to her, school conditions were much better.
[102] Interview with Helmut Holfert, 10 July 2012. For more on the role of *Neulehrer* in building "antifascist schools" in the Soviet Occupied Zone (1945-1949), see Blessing, *The Antifascist Classroom*.

apart from their own childhood, family life usually played a minor role in their accounts. Women interviewed were more likely to raise this issue, and subsequently also talked more about other aspects of social welfare in the GDR. In this category, by far the most popular topic for women and men alike was the ostensible quality of East German schools and the availability of child care – which indeed was important especially in the lives of women, as it allowed them to have a career when, arguably, most of their West German counterparts were still housewives. The choice for these themes is no coincidence: both were recent subjects of discussion in contemporary German politics, and they provide an excellent opportunity to contrast the GDR positively to united Germany.

Although all narrators made a point of mentioning the Stasi, the former secret service was primarily a topic for its former officers; for them, a defence of the Stasi is closely related to the justification of their own life choices, or "biographies". Others often mentioned the Stasi mainly to assure me that the secret service had had no impact on their lives, or if so, only in a very limited way. Typically, they would argue that the Stasi was a logical necessity in the hostile environment of the Cold War. The interviewed would agree that the system of state security had been "overstretched", but this was usually seen as a matter of degree rather than principle. This vision was even shared by people who had in fact suffered from Stasi interference in their private lives, as the story of Hildegard Müller in chapter 1 has shown. Another often-heard argument was that the Stasi had not been much different from security agencies elsewhere. In this context, OKV members frequently pointed to Edward Snowden's recent revelations about the NSA, one of the many US secret intelligence services. That Snowden eventually requested to stay in Russia made him even more popular among the generally rather Russophile OKV activists.[103]

Stories of life after the Fall of the Wall were more diverse, and reflected the different positions that people were now in. It is remarkable that activists' trajectories went into various directions from the early 1990s, that is, from the very time that these people came together in associations. My informants were no homogenous group in GDR times, but exactly from the time they started to form a community, their individuality in biographical detail seems to increase. Not only did their fate in 1990 differ (some were prosecuted, many went into retirement, and others became unemployed), there was also a substantial variation in individuals' ability to cope with these changes. Günther Klein initially went into complete

[103] Uncritical support for Putin seems to be rooted in the identification of Russia as the legitimate successor to the Soviet Union. Many OKV members understand Russia as the main geopolitical contender of the capitalist world – and therefore also to capitalism; this opinion is not hindered by a reflection on Russia's factual policies.

retreat, unable to still endure even the least bit of small talk. Klaus Wons, obviously devastated by the loss of his state and, maybe even more significant, his workplace, reacted with a long and ultimately unsuccessful campaign to save the *Palast der Republik*. Rolf Berthold, the GDR's last ambassador to China, soon found a new vocation as a tour guide for groups of old comrades interested in seeing that giant state still led by a Communist Party.[104] And, apparently because of his "many connections" abroad, former foreign trader Rudolf Denner soon found a relatively well-paid job at a time when Western companies entered the East German market.[105] The relative ease (or hardship) that people had in adjusting to the new political and economic system explains the variations in the tone of their accounts. Yet significantly, this did not lead to a change in their overall arguments. As for previous periods, the general tenor of the stories they shared about their post-1990 situation was quite coherent, but now in the negative. Most reflections on recent events were connected to a negative valuation of current life experiences compared to life in the former socialist state, and usually centered again on the issue of social welfare and antifascism – in this case in the form of a broader pacifist agenda (including an indictment of the "western war on Serbia"). Moreover, as shown in chapter one, when recalling positive experiences after 1990, respondents generally attributed these to personal circumstances, or even plain luck, whereas negative experiences were understood as the regular result of state policy and ideology. When talking about the GDR, these same respondents employed an opposite strategy, in which positive experiences were attributed to the state, and negative experiences were rendered personal. Thus, with respect to life in the GDR, it is the uniformity of positive identification that constitutes OKV biographies, whereas with respect to unified Germany, negative identifications are on the whole connected to a broader variety of issues reflecting the individual's own situation.

Conclusion

The first part of this dissertation discussed the topics of memory and nostalgia, political epistemics and socialist autobiographies, and looked at the patterns of arguments used by OKV members to defend the GDR and, more specifically, their own lives in the former socialist state. Together, chapters 1 and 2 explore the ideological framework and accompanying historical narratives that are defended, created, and promoted in the

[104] Interview with Rolf Berthold, 7 November 2012.
[105] Interview with Rudolf Denner and Klaus Wons, 10 July 2012.

community of OKV activists. Although the interviews show that there are many differences in the life histories of the respondents, what is most striking is in fact the similarity in narrative forms and patterns displayed throughout the interviews. I suggested several reasons that contribute to this uniformity. These include the common experience of writing socialist biographies before 1989. After German unification, uniformity was consciously maintained by a continued reiteration of GDR narratives and by the integration of new experiences into a common master-narrative. This master-narrative characterizes the OKV as a memory group, and is aimed at keeping intact the OKV's socialist worldview. Yet the OKV is not only an inward-looking community. Founded in the early 1990s, it also functions as a network of organizations in defense of the former GDR and its functionaries, employing several strategies, including lobbying state institutions and politicians, claiming their rights in courts, and publicizing their opinions in like-minded news outlets.

In Part II of this dissertation, I will look at the activities of OKV-related associations. What are the aims of these organizations? What strategies do they choose to achieve their goals? Chapter 3 will provide an overview of the various organizations associated with the OKV, and discuss the purpose of the OKV's structure as a network. The chapter will show how much the goals and activities of the OKV are rooted in a specific understanding of politics in the GDR and after that allows OKV members to review their own lives positively, and without remorse.

PART II:

THE *OSTDEUTSCHES KURATORIUM VON VERBÄNDEN*

Chapter 3:

A Complementary and Overlapping Web: the Scope of OKV Organizations and Their Focus Areas

In the first part of this dissertation, I looked at the individual and collective narratives of OKV members, and how these narratives, while rooted in the past, provide a source for self-esteem in the present. In the second part of the dissertation, the focus will be on the actual organizations of the OKV. This part of the dissertation thereby explores how the OKV's historical and political understandings translate into action.

This chapter discusses how the *Ostdeutsches Kuratorium von Verbänden* (East German Board of Associations; OKV) came into being and how it branched out to form a complex network of currently 26 affiliated associations that claim to represent the specific interests of the citizens of East Germany; the former GDR. Many of these groups were established in the early 1990s, while other groups originated at a later date either as work groups of already existing OKV organizations, or as independent clubs affiliated directly with the OKV. These groups are united by a common approach to GDR history and present-day Germany, but they also have a certain division of labour, with larger organizations focussing mainly on interest representation, and smaller organizations (and sub-groups of bigger organizations) often focussing on GDR culture and historical representation. This chapter will discuss not only the bigger units, comprising several thousand members, but also the minor ones that are kept alive by just a handful of activists, for these smaller organizations cover specific niches which are vital to the whole of the OKV.

I will start with an overview of the *Ostdeutsches Kuratorium von Verbänden* as the umbrella organization that formally coordinates the work of its member organizations. I will then focus on one of its core organizations, the *Gesellschaft zum Schutz von Bürgerrecht und Menschenwürde* (Society for the Protection of Citizen's Rights and Human Dignity; GBM), which had a central role in the foundation and development of the OKV. The second section of the chapter will therefore start with the core business of the GBM, and then demonstrate that society's initial activities against the way in which GDR companies were reorganized and expanded to cover other GDR-linked topics with a more historical and cultural focus. Section three offers an overview of the whole spectrum of OKV-affiliated associations; this will

reveal both the full scope of themes and topics that were taken up by the OKV and the different organizational forms and strategies employed by OKV affiliates.

In conclusion, I will discuss how this network of larger and smaller organizations, precisely by operating jointly while remaining separate entities, provides individual members with a sense of GDR-linked "collective identity", and makes the OKV an epistemic community.

I. The Ostdeutsches Kuratorium von Verbänden

Origins of the OKV

As soon as the Berlin Wall came down and political change became inevitable, several groups of then still GDR cadres united in organizations to protect their immediate interests. Such organizations were usually formed around specific occupations, and were typically established by small groups of colleagues whose immediate interest at that time was their own now uncertain future.[1] At the same time, SED-successor party PDS was also building a network of interest groups in east Germany.[2] The PDS, which at that time also presented itself as an "Eastern German interest party", was even instrumental in the establishment of the OKV, which originally seems to have been intended as a "transmission belt" of organizations around the PDS. In his book on the development of the PDS-*Linke* since 1989, David Patton suggests that "PDS members, former elites and local PDS politicians commonly participated in three broad types of interest groups in the new federal states: those with institutional origins in the former GDR; those that formed to assist and inform the Federal Republic's newest citizens (e.g. tenant rights, tax provisions, unemployment, political education); and associations that more narrowly represented former GDR elites." [3] Such organizations helped the PDS to (re)establish a foothold in the East German society: "This network of associations … anchored the PDS' presence in the new federal states and put the party in touch with the problems of ordinary eastern Germans."[4]

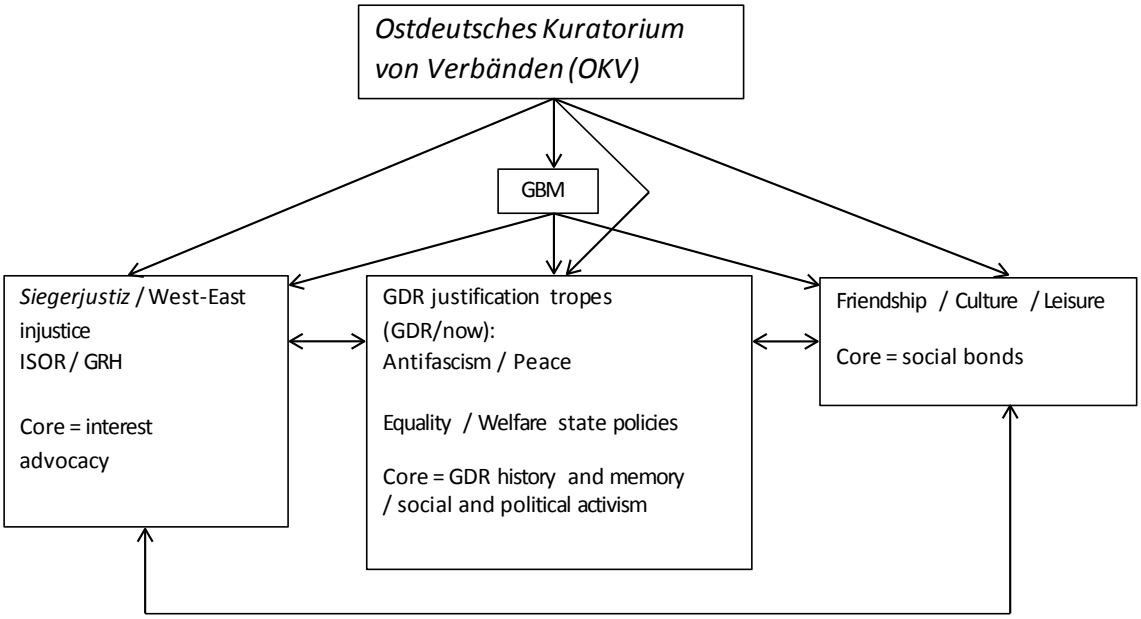
Several organizations that Patton mentions are, or were, members of the OKV. These include the *Democratic Women's Federation of Germany* (DFB); "self-help groups for the

[1] Interview with Günther Leo, 12 December 2013; interview with Wolfgang Schmidt, 12 June 2012.
[2] Inka Jörs, *Postsozialistische Parteien: Polnische SLD und ostdeutsche PDS im Vergleich* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften 2006), pp. 102-105.
[3] David Patton, *Out of the East. From PDS to Left Party in Unified Germany* (Albany: SUNY 2011), p. 69.
[4] Patton, *Out of the East*, p. 73.

unemployed"[5]; as well as the GBM, ISOR and the GRH, which according to Patton "had many PDS members and often adopted similar positions."[6] A central organization in this network was the GBM, which was founded in 1991 to protest the way in which east German institutions were "unwound" (*abgewickelt*) after unification. In 1992, the GBM published an *Ostdeutsches Memorandum,* in which they stated that the German citizens had "no cause to celebrate" (*keinerlei Anlass zu feiern*)[7] on the occasion of the upcoming second anniversary of unification, and deplored the developments in, among other things, science, pensions, jobs, and housing conditions in east Germany since 1990.[8] Twenty-six organizations signed the memorandum. At a congress held on 2 October 1993, these organizations united in the *Kuratorium ostdeutscher Verbände,* later re-named *Ostdeutsches Kuratorium von Verbänden* (East German Board of Associations). Although the organization claims to represent the interests of the East German public broadly, the activities of the various OKV organizations clearly reflect the financial and legal interests as well as the cultural tastes of the GDR's former (functionary) elites.[9] Especially in the early years of the organizations, the link with the PDS was also clearly visible: "Although officially nonpartisan, the curatorium included Lothar Bisky and Bundestag deputy Uwe-Jens Heuer (PDS) as guest speakers at its inaugural congress", as Patton observed.[10]

[5] Patton, *Out of the East*, p. 70.
[6] Ibid., p. 72.
[7] "Ostdeutsches Memorandum: Prolog". In: *Neues Deutschland* (01 October 1992), p. 13. Accessed 2 November 2016: https://www.neues-deutschland.de/ausgabe/1992-10-01.
[8] "Ostdeutsches Memorandum". In: *Neues Deutschland* (1 October 1992), pp. 13-14; in 2003, the OKV published a new "*Ostdeutsches Memorandum*", which focused largely on developments in the same areas over the past decade. Wolfgang Richter and Dieter Becker (eds.), *Ostdeutsches Memorandum 2003* (Schkeuditz: GNN Verlag 2003).
[9] The current political identity of the OKV is a bit more elusive - as discussed in chapter five, OKV members generally see themselves as socialists and sympathize with either *Die Linke* or smaller radical left parties in Germany.
[10] Patton, *Out of the East*, p. 72.

The network of OKV member organizations



The illustration above takes into account the major fields of activities as well as the relations between the major OKV member units that will be introduced in more detail in the following sections. A first group of organizations under the OKV roof primarily agitates against *Siegerjustiz*, that is, the perceived unfair legal prosecution and regulations against functionaries associated with the GDR regime. This group includes two of the OKV core organizations, GRH and ISOR. It also includes the third core organization, the GBM, which in many ways can be seen as the organization that stood at the basis of the OKV. However, GBM has a much wider focus than lobbying, and is much more strongly involved with the other three components of the OKV's agenda, namely the memory of GDR antifascism, equality, and culture, and their promotion in post-GDR Germany.

A second group, which includes the majority of the smaller organizations in the OKV, is concerned with topics that are directly or indirectly linked to the two main GDR legitimation / justification tropes of antifascism and equality. Many of these started as offshoots of the GBM. Such organizations seek to preserve the GDR's legacy in these fields, either through historiography and preservation of monuments, or by engagement with the GDR ideals in the present. And a final group of organizations present in the OKV is primarily directed towards social contacts among its members, mainly through cultural and leisure activities which are again explicitly linked to the GDR, and through "traditional clubs" of former functionaries.

Of course, such a schematic depiction of the OKV reifies boundaries between organizations that are in fact much more fluid. As already stated, several of the smaller organizations exist both in an independent form and as work group within one of the core organizations. This goes for instance for the *Traditionsvereine* ("traditional clubs") of the GDR's Army (*Traditionsverband Nationale Volksarmee*; *Verband zur Pflege der Traditionen der Nationalen Volksarmee und der Grenztruppen der DDR*) and sports managers (*Freundeskreis der Sport-Senioren*). These associations exist as social organizations for former co-workers of the respective GDR institutions, but they are also affiliated with the GRH as the organization that defends their rights (and innocence) in court. The social component of the big lobby organizations GRH (and ISOR, which has a "Stasi membership") is thus given shape and content in affiliated organizations with strong ties to GRH and ISOR. And vice versa, the small social clubs also remain important components of these larger organizations. In defending their past activities, these organizations are moreover heavily invested in a specific reading of the past, which they seek to maintain and promote. Several of the organizations with a cultural, social and historical focus are closely linked to, or part of, the GBM, which thereby stands out as the OKV component with the broadest profile. It should moreover be noted that many organizations have overlapping membership – with many OKV members being passively or actively engaged in two or more organizations. Organizational forms and activities also overlap greatly – which is unsurprising given that the different organizations share many general goals, of which they emphasize some more than others.

Existing varieties in organizational forms and methods can be largely explained through the different characters of the organizations. It also depends on the available avenues of interest advocacy. And groups differ in how they organize and mobilize their members; some of these action patterns are clearly continuations from GDR times (as in the case of the *Traditionsvereine*), while others seem to be post-Wende innovations. Conversely, similar strategies employed by different organizations can sometimes be explained by the overlap of leading members. A case in point here is the *Freundeskreis Palast der Republik* and the *Freundeskreis Ernst Thälmann Gedenkstätte* – both organize "temporary exhibitions" (*Wanderausstellungen*) with photographs and artifacts of the now lost monuments. The organization of these *Wanderausstellungen* is in the hands of Rudolf Denner, a passionate

amateur photographer who is a member of the board of both organizations (as well as of the Board of the OKV).[11]

OKV affiliates

The number of organizations affiliated with the OKV slightly fluctuates over time. In September 2016, 26 member organizations were listed on the OKV's website, including some *Arbeitskreise* (work groups) which are listed as independent organizations but have in fact been established within the framework of GBM, GRH or ISOR. Most member organizations have been part of the OKV for many years, while some organizations have joined recently (*Unentdecktes Land*, the most recent OKV member, joined in 2015). Conversely, other organizations that had once been members of the OKV died out or left because of ideological differences. Such cases of joining and leaving OKV do not result from a development of ideology within the OKV, but from debates within the member organizations; to take an example, the GBM, the organization that stood at the birth of the OKV, grew out of the *Arbeitslosenverband Deutschland* (German Union for the Jobless) [12] – yet the founders of the GBM decided to break away from the *Arbeitslosenverband* precisely because of the latter's wish to dissociate itself from any particular political group. Similarly, the *Friedensglockengesellschaft Berlin*,[13] an organization devoted to the maintenance of the Japanese temple with a peace bell that was inaugurated on 1 September 1989 in the East Berlin *Friedrichshain* park in remembrance of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, hotly debated possible membership in the OKV: some activists considered it favorable to be part of a larger association, but others rejected any affiliation with the OKV because of the latter's political outlook.[14] Until now, the *Friedensglockengesellschaft* has not joined the OKV.

Membership in individual OKV organizations

The number of individual members within the OKV's affiliates is difficult to estimate. The larger organizations that comprise the core of the OKV membership are very closed about the

[11] Interviews with Siegfried Mechler and Rudolf Denner (8 November 2012) and Max Renkl (8 November 2012).
[12] The *Leitsätze* of the *Arbeitslosenverband Deutschland* reflect its identity as an East German and leftist organization for the interests of the unemployed. ALV's emphasis on inclusiveness and interest in (broader) cooperation makes them stand apart from the OKV.
[13] For more information on this organization, see http://www.berlin-friedensglocke.de/index.html.
[14] Conversation with Bernd Mewes, 6 Augustus 2013.

number of their affiliates. In general, we may assume that especially ISOR's claim to represent 20.000 members is a gross overestimation, and that this organization uses the inflated membership claims as an argument in its political and legal struggles. Both GRH (1.100 members) and GBM (2.000 members) claim significantly less associates.[15] At the same time, it is difficult to estimate how far not only members of smaller organizations, but also those of the bigger organizations overlap, although this seems to be less the case because ISOR and GRH target very specific groups. Moreover, when estimating the number of people affiliated to the OKV milieu, two extra problems appear: Aside from official organization members, there is a group of sympathizers that is not officially affiliated with any of the OKV organizations (like Monika Albrink, who is introduced in detail in chapter two; she irregularly attends GBM cultural events, and cooperated in a GBM book project, but is not a GBM member).

Conversely, for many years the OKV boasted membership figures based on the affiliation of large organizations in which most members may not even have been aware of the OKV at all. In 2012, the *Democratic Women's Federation of Germany* (DFB) left the OKV after a change of leadership[16] – suggesting that affiliation with the OKV was based on personal contacts of specific board members rather than a reflection of the general position of the DFB. And the latest example of such partial and personal ties with the OKV within a larger organization is the VVN-BdA. This large antifascist organization was born out of the merger of the West (VVN) and East German (BdA) antifascists in the mid-1990s, and until 2015 it was listed among the OKV affiliates.[17] Although the "eastern" part of this organization was the former official antifascist organization of the GDR, it is unlikely that members of the west-VVN, which had until the early 1990s been closely associated with the German Communist Party (DKP), were even aware of their apparent affiliation with the OKV. Eventually, in 2016 the VVN-BdA disappeared from the OKV's list of associated organizations.[18]

What is clear is that the overwhelming majority of individual members of OKV-affiliated organizations are male, and born before 1945. The age of the OKV members can be explained by generational factors; as chapter two showed, OKV members defend a specific

[15] Upon its foundation, the GBM had over 4.000 members. By late 2012, there were still 2075 members in the organization. Interview with Ernst Jager, 06 August 2013. Around the same time, the GRH claimed "about 1100, 1200 members" (Interview Dieter Stiebert en Hans Bauer, 14 June 2012). It can be assumed that membership further declined since then due to natural attrition.
[16] Interview with Siegfried Mechler and Rudolf Denner, 8 November 2012.
[17] The VVN-BdA was listed as a member both on the OKV website and on the visit card of president Matthias Werner.
[18] A current list of members can be found on the OKV's website: http://okv-ev.de/mitglieder.htm.

political understanding of the GDR that is heavily influenced by their lived experience in the former state. The strict adherence to GDR narratives and hierarchies with which they create an environment of continued positive validation of GDR understandings is incapable of attracting a new membership which does not share the OKV members' experiences of the past. For this reason, OKV attempts to attract new and younger members have by and large failed. Those organizations with a slightly younger membership usually consist of people who also grew up in the GDR as committed socialists, albeit in later decades, and often as the children of socialist elites.[19] The predominantly male membership of the OKV is a reflection of the division of labor in the GDR: most state-bearing functions were occupied by men. This included the secret services and the military, but also jobs in diplomacy and foreign trade. Thus it is no surprise that ISOR and the GRH especially, as the primary lobby organizations that represent the interests of such former functionaries, have a largely male membership.

Internal organization

The board of the OKV is currently made up of 11 members, which predominantly hail from the three largest OKV organizations. The most important exception to this rule is the OKV's current chair Matthias Werner (elected December 2013; re-elected 2015), who is active for the *Wohn- und Ferienheim Heideruh e.V.* (Residential and Holiday Home Heideruh). However, apart from first OKV president Peter-Michael Diestel (1993-4), who was the last GDR minister of the interior in the de Maizière-government (1990) and who seems to have been largely selected for the OKV presidency due to his political connections, Werner's other predecessors all came from the bigger OKV organizations: Wolfgang Richter (1994-2003; GBM), Siegfried Prokop (2003-5; GBM), and Siegfried Mechler (2005-13; GRH). Strikingly, all three were also professors.[20] According to Mechler, the decision to promote people with an

[19] See e.g. the personal profiles of Matthias Werner and Dieter Feuerstein in chapter two, as well as the information on *Unentdecktes Land* below.

[20] Siegfried Prokop (b. 1940) was Professor of Contemporary History (*Zeitgeschichte*) in the GDR. Quickly after the *Wende*, he became an active campaigner for "east German interests", with a specific interest in giving an 'east German" [restorative] view on GDR history. From 1994 to 1996 he was also the chair of the *Alternative Enquetekommission "Deutsche Zeitgeschichte"/ Berliner Alternatives Geschichtsforum*. He is also one of the "founding fathers" (*Urgesteine*) of the GBM – and he was one of the founders of the GBMs magazine ICARUS, which was published from 1994 until 2012. From 2003-2005, he was the chairman of the OKV. Wolfgang Richter, "Erwiderung zur Verleihung des Menschenrechtspreises der GBM am 10. Dezember 2012". In: *Akzente. Monatszeitung der Gesellschaft zum Schutz von Bürgerrecht und Menschenwürde e.V.* 167 (2013), pp. 4-5; here p. 5. Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.gbmev.de/dokmnte/akzente/Zeitung_akzente_01-13.pdf. Wolfgang Richter (b. 1940) worked at the Humboldt University's department of Marxism-Leninism. After German unification, he briefly worked at the newly established institute of peace and conflict studies, until going

academic title to the OKV's presidency was taken to enhance the authority of the organization, as academic titles are ostensibly important to West Germans.[21] It seems more likely, however, that this reflects a social hierarchy among the founders of the OKV; the GBM notably was established by a club of former professors as well.

Current president Matthias Werner is assisted by no less than 4 vice-presidents, 2 of whom represent the GBM, while the other two are members of ISOR and the GRH, respectively.[22] Of the remaining board members, Dieter Becker (GBM) and Helmut Holfert (ISOR) again represent the OKV's core organizations. Only Joachim Bonatz (*Initiative für Gerechte Altersversorgung*; IGA) and Rudolf Denner (*Freundeskreis Palast der Republik*) do not belong primarily to ISOR, GRH or GBM, along with the two auditors, Lothar Nätebusch (*Bündnis für Soziale Gerechtigkeit und Menschenwürde*; BüSGM) and Klaus Schan (*FK Sportsenioren*).

Over the past five years, four members left, and only one new member has joined the board of the OKV – Joachim Bonatz (IGA). Members who leave the board typically do so for reasons of ageing, and it is difficult to find people to replace them. Shortly before the OKV's board meeting of 2013, Siegfried Mechler maintained that he had been in function as chair for so long because it was hard to find anyone willing to succeed him,[23] and he was indeed excited to have found a successor in Matthias Werner (b. 1946), a former sector head at the SED's central committee and PDS activist who is engaged in the board of the antifascist holiday home of *Heideruh*, near Hamburg. His candidacy for the chairmanship was also welcomed because of his "relatively young age", and during the meeting, he was elected unanimously. After the voting, Werner joked that he hoped his fellow board members had not elected him because of his age, something that was promptly followed by laughter and many shouts of "sure we did!"[24]

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into retirement in 1992. Richter was the long-term president of the GBM, and led the organization from its foundation in 1991 until 2012. Siegfried Mechler's vita is discussed in more detail in chapter two.

[21] Interview with Siegfried Mechler, 12 July 2012.

[22] Vice-presidents Karl-Heinz Wendt (GBM president) and Klaus Blessing represent the GBM; Rolf Scheffel is a member of the board of ISOR; and Hans Bauer is the chair of the GRH. See also the OKV's website: http://okv-ev.de/.

[23] Mechler already made mention of the problems in finding a successor in mid-2012. Interview with Siegfried Mechler, 12 July 2012.

[24] OKV meeting, 12 December 2013.

Activities

As an umbrella organization, the OKV is primarily responsible for coordination between different organizations within its network, which it does through board meetings and regular contacts between the chairs and directors of especially the bigger organizations ISOR, GRH and GBM. The involvement of smaller organizations depends on the degree to which the chairpersons of their respective boards are engaged in the OKV (to take an example, Rudolf Denner of the small FPdR is highly active in the OKV). The OKV primarily lends support to the actions and activities of its affiliates by encouraging cross-participation among members. Such calls can be found on the OKV's internet website, as well as in the OKV newsletter (OKV-*Nachrichten*), which is published around four times per year and which features editorials on GDR history and current issues (e.g. "Our Free German Youth was established 70 years ago" (01/2016)[25]; "Ramstein: a synonym for war and intervention" (02/2016)[26]. The newsletter publishes press statements and information on the proceedings of several OKV affiliates, and calls for action and solidarity with other organizations of the OKV board. Additionally, the OKV board regularly publishes statements and letters in support of the causes of individual member organizations, again with the idea of adding weight to particular claims by the numerically bigger partners lending their support.[27] Members of the OKV board repeatedly mentioned how many individuals they represent, and seem genuinely convinced that this should give them political clout.[28] It should be no surprise that they mainly petition politicians of the SED-successor party *Die Linke*, but the OKV also contacts politicians of other parties (especially leading politicians such as the Chancellor), and even international bodies such as the European Court for Human Rights or the United Nations.

Although largely a coordinating body, the OKV is also engaged in all the focus areas of the different organizations described above. Since 2007, the OKV organizes an annual "protest meeting" on 3 October, the national Day of German Unity. This "Alternative Celebration of Unity" (*Alternative Einheitsfeier*) always consists of a number of speeches on

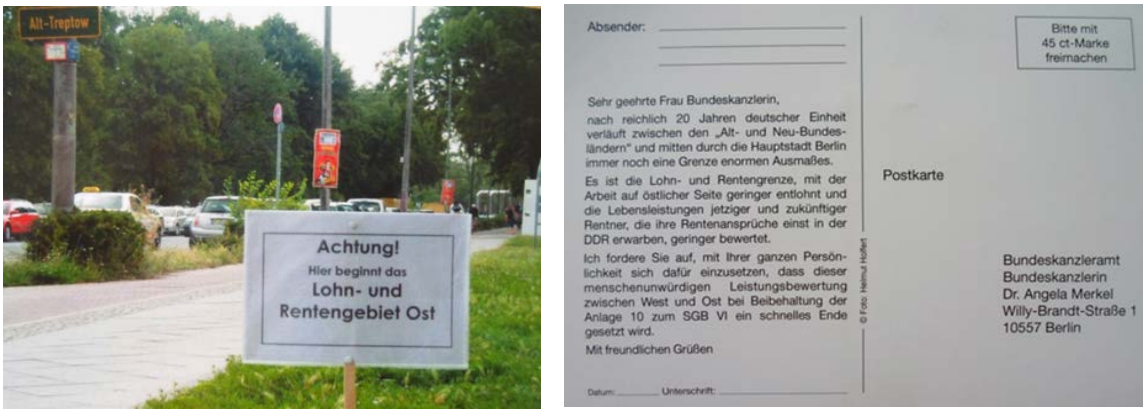
[25] Dieter Luhn, "Vor 70 Jahren wurde unsere Freie Deutsche Jugend gegründet". In: *OKV Nachrichten* 1(2016), pp. 2-3. http://okv-ev.de/Dokumente/OKV%20Nachrichten/OKV%20Nachrichten%201_2016.pdf (accessed 2 November 2016).
[26] OKV Redaktion, "Ramstein: Synonym für Krieg und Intervention". In: *OKV Nachrichten* 2(2016), pp. 1-2. http://okv-ev.de/Dokumente/OKV%20Nachrichten/OKV%20Nachrichten%202_2016.pdf (accessed 2 November 2016).
[27] A list of "statement and reports"(*Erklärungen und Berichte des OKV*) can be found on the OKV's website (accessed 2 November 2016): http://okv-ev.de/erklaerungen_okv.htm
[28] Interviews with Wolfgang Schmidt (8 August 2013), Siegfried Mechler (12 July 2012), Matthias Werner (8 May 2015).

the GDR and developments after 1990, and a musical contribution by a likeminded group.[29] In everything the OKV does, the underlying motive of maintaining the "Ost Milieu" is thus notable. In terms of present-oriented activities, the OKV obviously supports the lobbying activities of ISOR, GRH and GBM; and as said, most of the OKV board members are also active in one of these organizations. However, the OKV also seems to directly coordinate protest actions against the current German pension system. In 2011, the OKV continued an action of the *Sozialer Arbeitskreis Treptow-Köpenick* against the inequality between East and West German pensions with pre-printed postcards petitioning the German chancellor (see picture). The original actions included painted lines over the former FRG-GDR border, with the sprayed slogan *Achtung! Hier beginnt das Lohn- und Rentengebiet Ost* ("Warning! Here begins the wage- and pension-area East"), modelled after former border posts informing travellers they were leaving West-Berlin ("*Achtung! Sie verlassen jetzt West-Berlin!*"). An accompanying campaign was conducted by the "Initiative for Fair Pensions" (*Initiative für Gerechte Altersversorgung*; IGA), an organization that can only be contacted via the OKV offices, and which is led by Heinrich Tauchert, a former FDJ and Stasi functionary who is also active in ISOR and maintains close contacts to the GRH.[30] This group started a petition action in which people were called upon to sign and send pre-fabricated postcards to Chancellor Angela Merkel to protest against the pension inequality between East and West Germany. And in 2014, the OKV published a 46-page long rapport on "pension injustice", and lobbied *Die Linke* to propose legislative change.[31]

[29] A report of the 2016 event can be found at the OKV's website (accessed 2 November 2016): http://okv-ev.de/report_Protest%202016.htm

[30] The link between the IGA and ISOR can also be clearly seen from Tauchert's engagement with the issue of Stasi pensions in the name of the IGA. See e.g. Heinz Tauchert, "Rentenstrafrecht contra Grundgesetz –Unser Kampf um Gleichbehandlung". In: *OKV Nachrichten* 1(2013), pp. 1-2. In connection to the GRH, see also the "Beitrag des Genossen Heinrich Tauchert, Sprecher der Initiative für gerechte Altersversorgung (IGA)". In: GRH, *Sonder-Information. Veranstaltung des Vorstandes der GRH am 19. Februar 2015 anlässlich des 65. Jahrestages der Bildung des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit der DDR* (Berlin, March 2015), pp. 34-36.

[31] OKV Präsidium, *Gegen die Fortsetzung des Rentenunrechts – Für Rentengerechtigkeit. Stellungnahme des OKV zur Koalitionsvereinbarung der CDU-SPD-CSU Regierung vom 4. Februar 2014. 2. Auflage. Mit den Anträgen der Linkspartei* (Berlin 2014).



Postcard with pre-printed petition addressed to Chancellor Merkel that calls for a change in the system of pension-points calculation.

Congruent with the feeling of being misrepresented by German mainstream "capitalist" media, the OKV also puts a lot of emphasis on publicizing their opinions. According to the OKV's press speaker Helmut Holfert, the website of the association attracts several thousand visitors a month,[32] although it is unlikely that these are unique visitors. OKV activists furthermore publish in related newspapers and periodicals (*Neues Deutschland [ND]*, *Junge Welt [JW]*, *RotFuchs*) and in their own publications, not to mention the websites that the individual member associations maintain. Although *Neues Deutschland* and *Junge Welt* are not directly affiliated to the OKV, a large component of their readers is. Both ND and JW publish on OKV events, and the OKV has several times called upon its members to subscribe to these newspapers, which after German unification have had a hard time to keep up a circulation sufficient to survive.[33] *RotFuchs*, a monthly socialist magazine, is directly connected to OKV through its *Förderverein*. Besides administering *RotFuchs magazine*, the primary function of this "promotional association" seems to be social: member of the *RotFuchs Förderverein*'s board Rolf Berthold described it in 2012 as a platform for organizing events from a leftist perspective, and a place where like-minded people could meet.[34] Books published by members and organizations linked to the OKV include the GBM's *Weißbücher* on negative aspects of German unification, the first of which appeared in 1992,[35] as well as individual and collective volumes with articles on the same subjects;[36]

[32] Interview with Helmut Holfert, 10 July 2012.
[33] Interview with Siegfried Mechler and Rudolf Denner, 8 November 2012.
[34] Interview with Rolf Berthold, 7 November 2012.
[35] Wolfgang Richter (ed.), *Unfrieden in Deutschland: Weißbuch I, Diskriminierung in den neuen Bundesländern* (Berlin: GBM 1992).
[36] Erich Buchholz, *Unrechtsstaat DDR? Rechtsstaat BRD?: Ein Jurist antwortet (*Berlin: Edition Ost 2006) and *DDR-Strafrecht unterm Bundesadler* (Berlin: Kai Homilius 2011); Dieter Becker and Siegfried Mechler (eds.)

books with "insider views" on the MfS[37] and the personal stories of Stasi spies in the FRG;[38] and books which document the activities of individual OKV organizations, especially the juridical activities in which they were involved over the past two decades.[39] Most of these books appear with the publishing houses Edition Ost, Verlag am Park, GNN Verlag and Kai Homilius Verlag, in addition to self-publications by the organizations. A more complete overview of book publications by OKV organizations, activists and sympathizers can be found on the website of the GRH.[40] Such books are written for an audience of insiders: a run of 3.000 copies is considered a success.[41]

Organizational diagram of OKV-affiliated organizations

In what follows I will discuss the organizations attached to the OKV, ordered according to topical overlap. I will start with the origins of the GBM in protesting "injustices of unification", and specifically their campaigns against policies that were designed to reduce the privileged position of erstwhile GDR elites and to hold them accountable for their former activities. This latter topic, which the OKV regards as victor's justice (*Siegerjustiz*), is also the focus area of the OKV's other two core organizations, GRH and ISOR. I will then discuss the other focus areas of the GBM and related organizations. These include engagement in anti-war coalitions, in which criticism of German and NATO military policies is connected to an assessment of increased western military aggression after the fall of the USSR; engagement with the cultural and scientific legacy of the GDR, often through collections, exhibitions, and performances; the preservation of the historical memory of the GDR, in particular of the ideological narratives of antifascism and equality discussed in chapter three; and protest against current social policy in Germany, a topic that is also used in attempts to forge ties with other leftist organizations. Most organizations are involved in several topic areas simultaneously; in my analysis below they are ordered according to the topic which they stress most.

Priester der Klio?: Neokonservativer Geschichtsklitterung Paroli bieten. (Berlin: Kai Homilius 2007); Klaus Blessing and Siegfried Mechler (eds.), *Es reicht: Zwanzig Jahre ausgeplündert, ausgegrenzt, ausgespäht* (Berlin: Verlag am Park 2010).

[37] Werner Grossmann and Wolfgang Schwanitz (eds), *Fragen an das MfS: Auskünfte über eine Behörde* (Berlin: Edition Ost 2010).

[38] Klaus Eichner and Gotthold Schramm (eds.), *Top-Spione im Westen: Spitzenquellen der DDR Aufklärung erinnern sich* (Berlin: Edition Ost 2008).

[39] ISOR (ed.), *Wertneutralität des Rentenrechts: Strafrente in Deutschland?* (Berlin: Kai Homilius 2005).

[40] http://www.grh-ev.org; under "Buchempfehlungen".

[41] Interview with Wolfgang Schmidt, 12 June 2012.

Prime agenda:	***Strategies/ activities:***	***Groups:***
Siegerjustiz; "Injustices of Unification" (advocacy against prosecution and pension reductions; public rehabilitation MfS)	Lobbying; legal complaints	Big organizations: OKV - *Initiative für Gerechte Altersversorgung* GBM - *Arbeitskreis Menschenrechte* ISOR GRH - *AG Sport*
Antifascism; criticism of FRG military policies	Social and political activism	• Arbeitskreis Frieden / Europäisches Friedensforum – Deutsche Sektion • Arbeitskreis Solidarität • Deutscher Friedensrat • Mütter gegen den Krieg Berlin-Brandenburg • Freidenkerverband
Art and science	Cultural activities; leisure; trips; cultivation of friendship	• Arbeitskreis Kultur/ Freundeskreis Kunst aus der DDR • Arbeitskreis Kultur- und Bildungsreisen • ICARUS • Freundeskreis Palast der Republik • Erinnerungsbibliothek DDR
Historical memory; criticism of FRG memory policies	Collection and preservation of GDR historical documents, monuments and traditions	Antifascism: • Freundeskreis "Ernst-Thälmann-Gedenkstätte" Ziegenhals • Revolutionärer Freundschaftsbund e.V. (RFB) • Initiativgruppe Traditionstreffen Malá Úpa • Heideruh • VVN-BdA GDR general: • Berliner Alternatives Geschichtsforum; • DDR-Kabinett Bochum • Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaften Förderverein zur Geschichte der Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbewegung (VFDG) *Traditionsvereine*: • Work group on History of the Youth College "Wilhelm Pieck" • Traditionsverband Nationale Volksarmee – Soldaten für den Frieden • Verband zur Pflege der Traditionen der Nationalen Volksarmee und der Grenztruppen der DDR • Freundeskreis der Sport-Senioren • Verband der Kleingärtner, Siedler und Grundstücksnutzer VKSG
Social injustice; criticism of FRG social policies	Bringing OKV organizations together; links to parties and trade unions, on local level; multitude of local and general issues; social and political activism	• Sozialer Arbeitskreis Treptow-Köpenick • Bündnis für Soziale Gerechtigkeit und Menschenwürde e.V. (BüSGM) • Alliance for Social Justice Berlin-Lichtenberg / Hohenschönhausen (BüSGLH)
	Press; publications	• RotFuchs

II. OKV's major lobbying structures

As mentioned above, the origins of OKV lie in the *Gesellschaft zum Schutz von Bürgerrecht und Menschenwürde* (GBM). As the organization with the broadest profile, the GBM also serves as another coordination level below the actual board of the OKV.

The GBM was established on 31 May 1991, at the initiative of Rolf Nehring, Siegfried Prokop and Wolfgang Richter, out of their earlier activities as the *AG Abwicklung* at another interest organization, the *Arbeitslosenverband Deutschlands*. Due to its crucial role in the foundation of the OKV, the GBM appears as the real mother organization of the complex OKV web. At its peak, the GBM had about 6.000 members.[42] Currently, the organization still claims about 2.000 members, who are active in 31 local groups (*Ortsverbände*) and 5 thematic work groups.[43] The organization initially organized around the "broader" issue of East German unemployment after unification, but soon moved to defending the more specific interests of former GDR elites. It therefore makes sense to take the GBM as the starting point for a systematic analysis of the OKV's expansion and its internal division of labor, in the form of profile niches that complement each other to form the overall OKV identity.

Precursor: The Arbeitslosenverband Deutschland (ALV)

Today the German Association of the Unemployed (*Arbeitslosenverband Deutschland*, ALV), defines itself as an "association of citizens with the goal of promoting the care, welfare and representation of those threatened with and affected by unemployment, children of the unemployed, and other people in disadvantaged positions."[44] It functions as a charity organization that gives practical help in finding jobs and as a lobbyist for the interests of the unemployed. In order to achieve its goals, it says it is willing to work with all (political) parties concerned. Membership in the association is independent of political or religious outlook. The projects of the *Arbeitslosenverband* in Berlin, for instance, are funded by the Berlin Senate and the labour offices and district offices of Berlin.[45]

The *Arbeitslosenverband* started as a specific East German interest organisation. The ALV was founded in Leipzig in 1990, with the official goal of representing the interests of

[42] "Depending on whether you count the GRH members , at the top of our work we had 6000 to 8000 members." Richter, "Erwiderung zur Verleihung des Menschenrechtspreises der GBM", p. 4.
[43] These can be found on the website of the GBM: http://gbmev.de/GBM%20-%20OV.htm (accessed 2 November 2016).
[44] http://www.berliner-alv.de/.
[45] Ibid.

those who became unemployed through the dismantling of GDR factories, enterprises and institutions. Its most prominent co-founder was Dietrich Fischer, who had before the *Wende* been a professor at the campus of the Stasi's law college (*Juristische Hochschule*) in the city of Golm. Many other former MfS employees found their way to the ALV, which is also said to have been the first organization that united former cadres after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Based on the relatively rapid appearance of this organization, Manfred Wilke even speculates that it might have been founded by Fischer on the orders of "the Party".[46] One of the ALV's first actions was to file a complaint against the FRG before the Federal Court of Germany regarding massive unemployment amongst East Germans due to the closure and restructuring of GDR economic and scientific institutions.

This complaint, which was filed in December 1990, was dubbed the *Warteschleifenklage*, or "on-hold complaint".[47] The Unification Treaty had transferred the responsibilities of the GDR civil servants to the national or federal governments, depending on their tasks. Employees whose tasks were now regarded as redundant, were "unwound" (*abgewickelt*) in such a way that the respective employees were first put "on hold" for a period of 6 months in which they were paid 70% of their previous salaries.[48] At the end of the "waiting loop", they were either re-integrated, dismissed, or sent into (early) retirement.[49] This measure was heavily resented by many, and 302 constitutional complaints were filed against it, mainly on the grounds of sudden loss of employees' rights (job security). On 24 April 1991, the Constitutional Court overruled the complaints (BVerGE 84, 133), on the ground that the measures were in line with the interests of the state in the unification process. Continuing over-employment in the GDR would overstretch the financial capacities of federal and central governments. Also the additional complaint that the right of free choice of job place was violated was overruled by the constitutional court as unfounded. On 10 March 1992, a similar judgment was also passed in the case of 33 scientists of the (former) German Academy of Sciences in East Berlin (BVerfGE 85, 360).[50]

[46] Cited in Chris Humbs and Markus Weller, "Der Arbeitslosenverband Deutschlands e.V.: Lebt hier die Stasi weiter?" In: *Kontraste* (ARD, 13 January 2000). Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.aloport.de/start/inhalt/gefahr/show/htm/verband.htm .
[47] "Arbeitslosenverband klagt Rechte ein". In: *Neues Deutschland* (20 December 1990).
[48] It is interesting to note that legal complaints were used as strategy as early as late 1990 – and I will come back to this issue in the chapter on ISOR.
[49] Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte, *Handbuch zur deutschen Einheit, 1949-1989-1999* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus 1999), p. 128.
[50] Ibid, pp. 128-129.

The establishment of the GBM

In February 1991, while the *Warteschleifenklage* was still pending, an action group on "dismantling" or *Abwicklung* was founded at the *Arbeitslosenverband*. This group can be seen as a precursor to the *Gesellschaft zum Schutz von Bürgerrecht und Menschenwürde*, the first of the different OKV-groups to be formed. Amongst its organizers were Rolf Nehring, Siegfried Prokop and Wolfgang Richter,[51] who formulated a pamphlet "For Rights and Dignity", that on 15 March 1991 was endorsed by the board of the *Arbeitslosenverband*.[52] Ten days later, the action group *Abwicklung* wrote a letter to all those who supported the *Arbeitslosenverband* in its court case, with the request for information on their various cases of dismantlement. The group planned to compile a "white book" based on the information obtained.[53] Wolfgang Richter was also present at the court ruling in Karlsruhe on 24 April, and called the judgement "an unprecedented act of violence by public authorities."[54] Meanwhile, the pamphlet "For Rights and Dignity" was widely disseminated throughout the former GDR, and a petition was started under the same name. This led, on 31 May 1991, to the foundation of the *Gesellschaft zum Schutz von Bürgerrecht und Menschenwürde e.V.*, independent from the ALV. Wolfgang Richter became its first chairman.

Early work of the GBM – on pensions

GBM, as OKV's major core group, thus came out of protests against the dismantling of GDR institutes and enterprises that left many East German citizens jobless. Another point that was quickly taken up by the GBM were the new pension laws that were drafted in order to transfer East German pensions to the West German pension system.[55] Two weeks after the organization was founded, the GBM started meetings with other organisations concerned with the *Rentenüberleitungsgesetz*, and on 14 June 1991 the GBM organized a press conference to demand that "The Pension Transfer Act may not be adopted in this form!".[56]

Here a brief elaboration on the legal side of this pension issue is in order. In April 1991 the Bundestag Committee on Labour and Social Affairs (*Ausschuss für Arbeit und*

[51] Both Prokop and Richter were later presidents of the OKV. See footnote 20.
[52] "Chronik der GBM e.V.: Das Jahr 1991". Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.gbmev.de/chrnk/GBM_Chronik_1991.htm
[53] "Chronik der GBM e.V.: Das Jahr 1991."
[54] In German: "einen beispiellosen Akt öffentlicher Gewalt". See the "Chronik der GBM e.V.: Das Jahr 1991".
[55] *Rentenüberleitungsgesetz*, RÜG; and *Gesetz zur Überleitung der Ansprüche und Anwartschaften aus Zusatz- und Sonderversorgungssystemen der DDR*; AAÜG. See also footnotes 57 and 58.
[56] "Das Rentenüberleitungsgesetz darf so nicht beschlossen werden!" From: "Chronik der GBM e.V.: Das Jahr 1991".

Sozialordnung) held a hearing on the draft Pension Transfer Act (*Rentenüberleitungsgesetz*, RÜG)[57] and the Law on the Transfer of Claims and Entitlements for Additional- and Special Retirement Schemes of the GDR (*Gesetz zur Überleitung der Ansprüche und Anwartschaften aus Zusatz- und Sonderversorgungssystemen der DDR*; AAÜG).[58] The governments of the two German states agreed in the Treaty on the Establishment of German Unity of 30 August of 1990 to unify pension law by converting the GDR pension system into the (old) FRG system. This was done with the Pension Transfer Act, which was approved by the now all-German Bundestag on 25 July 1991 in accordance with the Unification Treaty.

In converting GDR pensions into the FRG system, former GDR citizens' pensions were recalculated. In short, in the new system citizens received annual pension points based on their salary, and the height of pensions depends on the amount of points collected by retirement. Thus, GDR citizens' pensions were retrospectively calculated based on their previous occupations and salaries in the GDR. From the start, the issue of pension-point calculation was taken up by organizations claiming to defend specific East German interests, because the special treatment of pensions acquired in the former GDR was of significance to large parts of the former GDR population. The (perceived) inequality between East and West also undermined nation-building, and thereby benefitted organisations feeding on an "eastern identity" of the former GDR population, such as the GBM.[59]

Apart from the general group of "East Germans", several smaller groups were specifically targeted by the new law on additional and special retirement schemes. This included pension-cuts for persons who had "violated the basic principles of law and humanity".[60] This rather vague definition initially included all who worked in functions seen as "close" to the regime, including not only political elites and secret service personnel, but also cultural and scientific elites. They had often earned relatively high wages in the GDR, and therefore had expected to receive relatively high pensions. While in general their pensions were cut to the average GDR level, those who had been employed directly by the Stasi could

[57] The full text of this law can be found at: http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/r_g/BJNR016069991.html (accessed 2 November 2016).
[58] http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/aa_g/BJNR016770991.html#BJNR016770991BJNG000100307 (accessed 2 November 2016).
[59] Simon Hegelich, "Disintegration as a Result of Welfare Expansion. The Integration of East Germany in the German Pension System". Paper for the *European Consortium for Political Research Joint Session of Workshops* (Edinburgh 2003), p. 15. Accessed 2 November 2016:
https://www.uni-muenster.de/imperia/md/content/ifpol/forschen/regieren/hegelich.pdf.
[60] Weidenfeld and Korte, *Handbuch zur deutschen Einheit*, p. 129.

initially not obtain more than 70 per cent of the average GDR pension.[61] In response to this regulation, former GDR Army (NVA) and MfS personnel formed interest groups to fight this provision of the law.

Another group that was hit by the law on special retirement schemes included people who had earned relatively little in the GDR, but whose small salaries were partly compensated by extra government funds directed towards increasing their pensions. This group included for instance caretaking staff in hospitals and kindergartens. They were not seen as elites in the GDR, nor were they specifically close to Party or state. Yet because their additional pensions had been paid for by contributions of the state instead of their own, and the state was now being dismantled, these provisional extra pensions were annulled.[62] Initial attempts to include this group in the GBM through its lobby activities on pensions however largely failed, as this group did not share the GBM's attachment to the GDR.

In response to the draft laws, Dr. Fritz Rösel (1926-2003), who had been a member of the GDR trade union FDGB's board of directors from 1962 until the full board resigned in December 1989,[63] called for the equal treatment of pension rights of GDR and FRG citizens. Labelling the "pension-cuts" politically motivated, he demanded that there should be no discrimination on account of place of residence and former activity in the GDR.[64] In 1993, Rösel founded the *Förderkreis Senioren* within the GBM, which aimed to organize the "protest and resistance against discriminatory pension regulations and against pension injustice for all affected in their multitude and diversity, in Berlin and in the new *Bundesländer*."[65] Here we see an attempt to link both issues regarding pensions, namely that of the general pension system and that of the specific provisions targeting special "tainted" groups, in order to mobilize a broader interest coalition for a common "East-German cause". And here again, the preferred method to organize protest was by providing information on the law and by supporting people in formulating legal complaints and setting up court procedures,[66] resembling both the activities of the initial PDS teams to assist and inform East German citizens and the later court procedures by ISOR. The rather bureaucratic character of

[61] See e.g. Hubertus Knabe, *Die Täter sind unter uns. Über das Schönreden der SED-Diktatur* (4th ed., Berlin 2011), p. 187.
[62] RÜG.
[63] Helmut Müller-Enbergs et.al., *Wer war wer in der DDR? Ein Lexikon ostdeutscher Biographien*, Band 2 (M-Z) (5th ed., Berlin: Ch. Links 2010), p.1090
[64] "Chronik der GBM e.V.: Das Jahr 1991".
[65] "Chronik der GBM e.V.: Das Jahr 1993". Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.gbmev.de/chrnk/GBM_Chronik_1993.htm.
[66] "Chronik der GBM e.V.: Das Jahr 1993".

these early GBM activities forms one of the explanations why the organization failed to coordinate mass-mobilization. Yet the primary reason why the GBM was not successful in establishing itself as a convincing advocate for the interests of all East Germans was that most former GDR citizens did in no way feel related to the specific problems of the secret service personnel it defended. In an atmosphere of open resentment against former authorities,[67] including the MfS and the NVA, not many saw their former repressors as convincing champions of their own cause.

Thematic and organizational development of the GBM

In subsequent years, the Pension Act remained one of the focus points of the GBM. Considering the remaining difference in pension-points calculation between former East and West, this issue also remains available to *claim* that this organization represents "Eastern Germans" in general (whether such rhetoric is accepted is another matter). However, the real scope of activities of the GBM very quickly narrowed down to the specific interests of a more select group of former regime stalwarts. This can be seen particularly when we trace the topic of *Abwicklung.*

In May 1992, the first *White Book* of the GBM was published. This publication was the outcome of the request for information on cases of *Abwicklung* that the action group *Abwicklung* of the *Arbeitslosenverband* had disseminated a year earlier, and was comprised mainly of the personal stories that came in as a reply to this request.[68] On 20 May 1992, the GBM together with other groups called for a public manifestation against "job destruction, exploding rents and pension deceit."[69] This demonstration also focussed on the issue of *Abwicklung*. Yet towards the mid-1990s, the process of *Abwicklung* was largely completed, and consequently this issue ceased to be a hot topic in public debate. Within the GBM, the issue remained current, but it could no longer be used to establish the organization as the champion of East German grievances in general. Instead, the GBM's activities on *Abwicklung* became focussed mainly on the small group of scientific and cultural elites who lost their jobs through this process. Thus, in 1994 a GBM committee on Human Rights represented several

[67] This atmosphere was also clearly felt by some of the people whom I interviewed. Rudolf Denner told how in his home village one of the neighbours told him that "they had already selected the pole [from which to hang me]". Interview with Rudolf Denner and Klaus Wons, 10 July 2012.
[68] Wolfgang Richter (ed.), *Weißbuch 1: Unfrieden in Deutschland, Diskriminierung in den neuen Bundesländern* (Berlin: GBM 1992).
[69] "Gegen Arbeitsplatzvernichtung, Mietenexplosion und Rentenbetrug". From: "Chronik der GBM e.V.: Das Jahr 1992". Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.gbmev.de/chrnk/GBM_Chronik_1992.htm.

individuals who filed complaints with UNESCO about the process of *Abwicklung* at East German scientific and cultural institutions;[70] and in 1997 the GBM and the OKV together organized a demonstration against the *Abwicklung* of former personnel of the GDR's Humboldt University.[71] Apart from such public activities, which are rather few and far between, statements on *Abwicklung* continued to be made as one of the many narratives of the FRG's unfair treatment of the GDR after 1990. My interviews demonstrated that the issue still resonates with members of the GBM and other OKV-organizations, many of whom, because of their previous functions close to the GDR regime, were unable to find new employment after 1990.[72] It also fits the more general trope of "unfair treatment" that is commonplace with other revisionist GDR-organizations as well as several radical left parties which at least partly share this vision of GDR history, such as groups within *Die Linke*, the German Communist Party (DKP)[73] and the Communist Party of Germany (KPD).[74]

Support for GDR functionaries against "Siegerjustiz": GRH and ISOR

GBM was also involved in the birth of the *Gesellschaft zur rechtlichen und humanitären Unterstützung* (Society for Legal and Humanitarian Support; GRH). The GRH was founded on 19 May 1993 as a member of both the GBM and the OKV, and claims to "help people to help themselves", and to be "against political prosecution and criminalization of GDR-citizens, [and] for rehabilitation, justice and historical truth."[75] More specifically, the GRH was founded with the goal of providing financial, practical and moral assistance to those former GDR-functionaries who in the early 1990s to mid- 2000s were prosecuted for their former activities (the last of these processes ended 2004). GRH founders were former attorneys and military functionaries who had already been actively engaged in setting up more limited informal social- and support groups amongst their former immediate colleagues

[70] "Chronik der GBM: Das Jahr 1994". Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.gbmev.de/chrnk/GBM_Chronik_1994.htm.
[71] "Chronik der GBM: Das Jahr 1994".
[72] See for more on this also the individual biographies of OKV activists in chapter two.
[73] This is the 'old' FRG communist party, which has an estimated membership of around 3.000.
[74] This party was founded in November 1989 by SED communist stalwarts who were unhappy about the changes their party undertook. The group has always remained very small, and comprises of an estimated 200 members. For a discussion of the links between OKV organizations and radical left parties, see chapter five.
[75] "Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe. Gegen politische Strafverfolgung und Kriminalisierung von DDR-Bürgern, für Rehabilitierung, Gerechtigkeit und Historische Wahrheit." See GRH website, "Was ist die GRH?" Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.grh-ev.org/html/body_was_ist_die_grh_.htm.

– and felt a need to combine and expand their networks when the first judicial processes neared.[76]

The only founder of the GRH who had no links to the NVA or the judiciary was Siegfried Mechler. From 1995 to 2004 he was the president of the GRH, not least because his "uninvolvedness" in the prosecuted past made him an ideal frontman for the organization.[77] Mechler said that his personal motivation to come into action was born out of the first "border guard trials" (*Grenzerprozesse* or *Mauerschützenprozesse*), which took place in 1991-92. Former border guards stood trial for having shot people when they attempted to escape the GDR. From the perspective of German law, these shootings required prosecution because also in the GDR manslaughter and murder had been illegal, and because the GDR leadership had always denied that it had issued a general "order to shoot" at the border. Thus, the former state leaders' attempt to absolve the GDR from guilt made their erstwhile border guards vulnerable to prosecution. This line of reasoning was however rather dissatisfactory, as most people assumed that the order to shoot in fact did exist. Moreover the two suspects in the first border guard trial, Ingo Heinrich and Andreas Kühnpast, declared in their defence that before starting service as border guards they had had to sign a written commitment to use firearms.[78] In 1994, the German Federal Court (*Bundesgerichtshof*) decided that the targeted shooting of unarmed civilians trying to escape the GDR could also be prosecuted on the grounds of international human rights principles.[79] Because the GDR was a signatory to such human rights treaties, individual soldiers should have known they were judicially, but especially morally, obliged not to shoot. Nevertheless, due to the many difficulties surrounding the trial of former border troops, penalties in all cases remained relatively low. Heinrich was initially sentenced to 3,5 years in prison. In its verdict, the court weighed the year-long indoctrination of Heinrich, and other border troops, by their military and political leaders, as an extenuating circumstance. Nevertheless, in May 1994, the *Bundesgerichthof* verdict held that this punishment was too high, on the grounds of Heinrich's low status as a common soldier who acted on higher orders. On appeal, Heinrich was sentenced to two years of imprisonment,

[76] Interview Günther Leo, 12 December 2013.
[77] Interview Siegfried Mechler, 12 July 2012. Subsequently, from 2004 to 2013, Siegfried Mechler was the president of the OKV. See also chapter two.
[78] Roman Grafe, "Die Privilegierung von Staatskriminellen: Prozesse gegen DDR-Grenzschützen und ihre Befehlsgeber (1990 bis 2004)", lecture at the University of Trient, 22 April 2006. Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.soc.unitn.it/SUS/attivita_del_dipartimento/convegni/maggio2006/gcabstracts/Grafe.htm.
[79] Cited in Klaus Marxen (ed.), *Strafjustiz und DDR-Unrecht Vol. 2(1): Gewalttaten an der deutsch-deutschen Grenze* (Berlin: De Gruyter 2002), p. 182.

which were then suspended.[80] This would set the standard for other trials, which in many cases ended in acquittal, and in those cases where the suspect was found guilty, usually resulted in suspended prison sentences. Because the former border guards were no longer active as soldiers, the actual chance of them committing a similar crime again in the future was of course near zero.

Other people who were prosecuted include several former judges of the GDR, as well as spies active outside the GDR and a small group of political leaders; these groups are also represented in the GRH. In general, the group of prosecuted was rather small, due to the FRG's initial decision to adhere to the *nulla poena sine lege* principle. This decision only to prosecute activities that were already illegal when committed, and thus illegal also under GDR law, naturally meant that most GDR functionaries went free.[81] It led to rather strange processes, because suspects were prosecuted for individual crimes, instead of for upholding a system that was deemed criminal. Thus for instance long-standing MfS leader Erick Mielke was convicted for the murder of Berlin police captains Paul Anlauf and Franz Lenck, which he committed as a member of the communist underground in 1931, years before the GDR came into existence.[82] In October 1993, Mielke was found guilty and convicted to a six-year sentence. Only two years later, he was released. In 1998 all other charges prepared against him, based on his activities as the leader of the MfS, were suspended on the grounds of his advanced age and poor health.[83] His leadership of the MfS, generally seen as his biggest crime, remained unpunished. Obviously, the GRH protested against Mielke's prosecution on any grounds. His daughter-in-law Marion Mielke (b. 1950), the daughter of a high-ranking Stasi officer who herself also worked for the Stasi, is also active in the GRH, and belongs to the organization's younger members.[84]

Currently, the GRH is led by Hans Bauer and Dieter Stiebert. According to these two men, the necessity to provide financial and moral support constitutes the main reason for the continued existence of the GRH, despite the fact that all trials have by now ended. In particular, they pointed to the financial difficulties that many of the former accused still have to pay off their lawyers, and to pay back trial costs to the state. Since most of the accused,

[80] Grafe, "Die Privilegierung von Staatskriminellen."
[81] See also Anne Sa'adah, *Germany's Second Chance. Trust, Justice and Democratization* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1998).
[82] John O. Koehler, *Stasi. The Untold Story of the East German Secret Police* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press 1999), p. 410; for more on the murders as well as the following flight of Mielke and his accomplice Erich Ziemer to Moscow, see ibid., pp. 33-44.
[83] Koehler, *Stasi*, p. 410.
[84] GRH, *GRH Mitteilungen* 1(2015), p. 3.

especially those who held higher functions in the judiciary, the military or the MfS, were already of higher age, they often were not employed anymore after 1990. Many of them also lost a substantial part of their pension due to the AAÜG. Thus, according to Hans Bauer, the GRH occasionally provides them with "humanitarian aid". This is coordinated by the work group on "Care and Solidarity" (*AG Betreuung / Solidarität*), and paid for by donations from their members:

> And then [what we do] as well [is]… humanitarian support, as we call it.… In such cases where there is a particular high need, or where someone gets sick, and where we say, he should be treated [*er muss zur Kur*], so, that costs a few hundred Euros. Well, this is all in the order of, maybe 3, or when it's really high, 500 Euros. But… then we need this money [collected from the members], yes.[85]

Aside from such practical help, the GRH also functions more and more as a social club, in which people with a similar background meet and support each other. Last, the GRH remains committed to fighting *Siegerjustiz*, victor's justice, despite the fact that the trials have ended. The organization reasons that the verdicts remain, in all cases, unjust. It thus publishes pamphlets, books and dvds as a complaint against this process. A good example of such a publication includes the book *Siegerjustiz?*.[86] Published in 2003, and spanning 592 pages, the larger part of the book sets out the GRH's general view on the juridical trials against former GDR functionaries, whereas the last 80 pages form a compilation of life stories of several persons who had to stand trial in the 1990s. These include two former judges, two former major-generals of the border troops, and a former colonel of the MfS. The book was complemented by a dvd, published in 2006, on which these persons, as well as several others, tell about their trials.[87]

At the moment, the GRH claims to still have about 1.100 members.[88] However, as with other OKV organizations, the GRH's membership is rapidly declining due to old age, with no prospects of renewal. The GRH's internal organization comprises several local groups (*Territoriale Arbeitsgruppen*; AGs), groups that unite people with the same professional background ("Border troops / International", "Sports", "Security" and "Reconnaisseurs" [*Aufklärer*; that is, people who worked for the Stasi in international espionage]), as well as thematic work groups on "Justice" and "Information and Documentation" and the above-

[85] Interview with Dieter Stiebert en Hans Bauer, 14 June 2012.
[86] GRH (ed.), *Siegerjustiz? Die politische Strafverfolgung infolge der Deutschen Einheit* (Berlin: Kai Homilius Verlag 2003).
[87] GRH, *15 Jahre Deutsche Einheit [&] politische Strafverfolgung. Siegerjustiz?* (Berlin: GRH 2006).
[88] Interview Dieter Stiebert en Hans Bauer, 14 June 2012.

mentioned *AG Betreuung* which are based in Berlin.[89] The group remains active, despite the advanced age of most of its members. According to Bauer and Stiebert, one of the reasons why the GRH manages to uphold a tight organization is the "high degree of organization of our members already in the GDR".[90]

Like the GRH, the OKV's biggest organization, ISOR, was also established to represent the judicial and political interests of its members. In the case of ISOR, these are the former co-workers of the GDR armed bodies and customs administration.[91] ISOR's claim to represent 20.000 members easily makes it the biggest organization within the OKV, even when taking into account that this is likely an overestimation. ISOR's and GRH's clientele partly overlaps, and the organizations are closely connected. Yet ISOR's narrow focus particularly on the pension claims of former Stasi members has made this organization less central in the thematic development of the OKV. A case study on ISOR's activities will follow in chapter four.

III. The OKV as a social and political milieu: groups and activities beyond lobbying

The following parts give an overview of OKV groups and their activities. The individual associations, as well as the most important work groups of GBM and GRH, will be grouped in six clusters, according to their most prominent focus areas: 1) "Unfair treatment" and human rights, 2) anti-fascism and peace, 3) art and science, 4) historical memory, including socialist *lieux de mémoire* and GDR/FRG historiography, 5) traditional clubs of former GDR state organs, and 6) organizations whose primary goals is to provide linkage with groups and parties outside of the OKV.

Cluster 1: "Unfair treatment" and human rights

The GRH's claim to fight "against political prosecution and criminalization of GDR-citizens, [and] for rehabilitation, justice and historical truth"[92] reflects the trope of unfair treatment of (loyal) GDR citizens in the FRG. OKV members understand such allegedly unfair treatment

[89] Ibid.
[90] Interview with Dieter Stiebert en Hans Bauer, 14 June 2012.
[91] ISOR is an abbreviation for the "Joint Initiative for the Protection of the Social Rights of Former Members of the Armed Bodies and the Customs Administration of the GDR" (*Initiativgemeinschaft zum Schutz der sozialen Rechte ehemaliger Angehöriger bewaffneter Organe und der Zollverwaltung der DDR*).
[92] "Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe. Gegen politische Strafverfolgung und Kriminalisierung von DDR-Bürgern, für Rehabilitierung, Gerechtigkeit und Historische Wahrheit." See GRH website, "Was ist die GRH?" Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.grh-ev.org/html/body_was_ist_die_grh_.htm.

as the symptom of a continuing animosity towards socialism in the FRG. Yet by virtue of winning the Cold War the FRG is now able to punish its defeated ideological enemies; hence the term "victors' justice" (*Siegerjustiz*). The general trope of "unfair treatment" is also very important to the GBM and other organizations in the OKV. While the group whose interests are directly represented by these organizations is pretty small, such interests are nevertheless still being presented as the interests of (former) East Germans *in general*. This is achieved partly by appealing to a resentment against "the West" having taken over the former GDR, shared by many people in East Germany. Specifically, particular interests are "wrapped up" within narratives about the violation of interests of the former GDR population as a whole. Thus, the GBM, as well as other organizations within the OKV, consistently speak of *Rentenunrecht* ("pensions injustice"), seemingly referring to the point system calculation current in Germany, without mentioning that their activities are in fact directed only towards a specific paragraph within the law that annulled the special provisions of those groups that had been close to the regime.[93] A similar strategy of wording can be seen in criticisms of the regulations that ban persons with a politically sensitive GDR past from civil service positions (*Berufsverbote*). These were initially intended to be introduced for all who had worked for or with the MfS, but their implementation was carried out only partially and left to the discretion of the different *Bundesländer*, where the various coalition governments handled the issue differently.[94]Although the *Berufsverbot* thus only targets a small group of people, it is presented by the GBM as a case of "discrimination in East Germany" and as a general human rights problem.

By linking the *Berufsverbot* for former Stasi members to earlier professional bans excluding communist and members of other "anti-constitutional groups" (*Verfassungsfeindlich*) from civil service in the FRG,[95] the GBM moreover establishes a connection between Cold War policies of the FRG and the situation in unified Germany, thus reiterating their view that people targeted for their professional activities in the GDR are subjected to "*Siegerjustiz*". The GBM also tried to expand the platform against professional

[93] This is §6 of the AAÜG. The AAÜG is further discussed in chapter four on ISOR; an organization devoted primarily to protesting this law.

[94] Some former civil right activists - politicians in the early 1990s wanted to include e.g. teachers in such *Berufsverbote* (including Brandenburg education minister Marianne Birthler). This led to friction in the Brandenburg parliament. In the end, Birthler left politics disappointed, after a majority of the parliament voted in favor of Manfred Stolpe's continuation of this presidency, despite his connections with the MfS. Sa'adah, *Germany's Second Chance*, p. 207. On the other hand, it soon transpired that it was impossible to fire everyone in certain professions. Thus, most East German policemen were relatively soon taken over into the BRD police.

[95] Several professional bans that excluded people who were members of anti-constitutional groups were adopted in the FRG, including the "Adenauer-Erlass" (1950) and the "Radikalenerlass" (1972).

bans by linking this issue to their participation in the German Forum of Human Rights groups (*Forum Menschenrechte*), which they joined in late 1994.[96] This linkage to a human right agency provides GBM with a semblance of impartiality, suggesting advocacy for commonly held values rather than for specific issues. In the same vein, the framing of specific interests as (part of) general interests serves to claim a larger support base than the GBM and other OKV organizations in fact have. This strategy also makes it possible to claim GBM "successes" whenever other professional groups of GDR times (that is, beyond the MfS) successfully fought against their inclusion in paragraph 6 of the AAÜG (which curtails pensions). Its affiliation with the *Forum Menschenrechte* moreover has boosted the image of the GBM as a serious, impartial organization – instead of a club for former East German elites. To the outsider, this image might seem credible: in a 2008 study on three domestic human rights organizations in Germany, the GBM features as one of the case studies.[97] Yet in the end, the affiliation with the *Forum Menschenrechte* faltered: in May 2012, the GBM was excluded from the *Forum Menschenrechte* after it refused to give up its justification of the GDR border regime. The OKV immediately protested this exclusion as an infringement of the right to freedom of expression.[98]

The hotchpotch of broader radical left political interests and specific GDR heritage can also be seen in the list of laureates that won the GBM's annual human rights prize. This list includes Cuban president Fidel Castro (1998); US human rights activists Angela Davis (2004); GDR artists Heidrun Hegewald, Willi Sitte and Walter Womacka (2009), and former GBM chair Wolfgang Richter (2012), amongst others.

More than 25 years after German reunification, the "*Abwicklung*" of former GDR personnel is no longer a topic of public debate. However, the GBM remains actively engaged in protesting pension inequality between West and East Germany; this issue remains the showpiece of "unification injustice" for the OKV as a whole. Likewise, the GBM supports ISOR in its struggle for full pensions for former Stasi members and their superiors. The GBM presents inequalities between East and West Germans as a human rights issue of discrimination. In a similar vein, also social welfare cuts are protested as an infringement on human rights, such as the right to participation and the right to work. Note that both these

[96] The *Forum Menschenrechte* is a "Network of German Human Rights Organizations", see http://www.forum-menschenrechte.de/1/ueber-uns/ (accessed 2 November 2016).
[97] Scott Calnan, *The Effectiveness of Domestic Human Rights NGOs: A Comparative Study* (Leiden: Marinus Nijhoff Publishers 2008).
[98] Das Präsidium des OKV, "'Ostdeutsches Kuratorium erklärt Solidarität mit der GBM', Beschlossen auf seiner Sitzung am 19. 07. 2012." Accessed 2 November 2016: http://gbmev.de/archv/OKV_Erklaerung_GBM_Forum_Menschenrechte_2012.htm.

rights were very important in the GDR: The right to work was central in all socialist states, whereas participation in official mass organizations and political rituals was understood as a token that the citizens endorsed the state. This again attests to the importance of GDR political narratives to GBM members – and to the continued justification of the GDR as indeed a "better", more humane state compared to the FRG. For these reasons, within the OKV most of the work that falls in the category of celebrating GDR equality over the shortcomings of the FRG welfare state is covered by the work group on Human Rights (*Arbeitskreis Menschenrechte*). By contrast, the GBM work group on Solidarity (*Solidarität*) that was established in 2006, is primarily responsible for the international solidarity projects of the GBM, rather than for social solidarity at home.

Cluster 2: Antifascism and peace

Another topic that is current in all OKV organizations is antifascism, the central legitimating ideology of the GDR. OKV members generally consider the GDR to have been a real antifascist state, and see this confirmed by current German involvement in military missions. Consequently, the GBM asserts its antifascist peace agenda through protest against Western, and especially German, international military deployment.

A very important rallying point here were the NATO bombings during the Kosovo War in 1999, which the GBM understands as an act of aggression against Yugoslavia/Serbia. This aggression was furthermore made possible by the weakness of Russia at that time: Although then-president Yeltsin objected to NATO's use of force, he did not offer military aid to the Serbs. In October 1998, the GBM petitioned all German political parties to forestall planned NATO bombings; by March 1999, several local groups were engaged in organizing petitions and protests against NATO's military engagement in Yugoslavia; and in the summer of 1999, the GBM started preparations for a "European Tribunal against the NATO War".[99] A first "hearing" was organized in Berlin in October 1999, followed by a second hearing in Hamburg (April 2000) and a verdict against NATO (Berlin, June 2000) in the presence of representatives from like-minded organizations from several European states and the US.[100] A similar international tribunal was later organized in New York (June 2000), with the GBM's

[99] http://www.nato-tribunal.de/.
[100] From: "Chronik der GBM e.V.: Das Jahr 1999". Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.gbmev.de/chrnk/GBM_Chronik_1999.htm; "Chronik der GBM e.V.: Das Jahr 2000". Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.gbmev.de/chrnk/GBM_Chronik_2000.htm

presence. The idea for such tribunals came from the "Slavic Tribunals against the Yugoslav War of NATO" initiated by Russia.[101]

One of the German partners in the NATO Tribunal is the *Deutscher Friedensrat* (German Peace Council; DF), a pacifist organization that was re-founded in 1990 from the remnants of the official GDR *Friedensrat* (est. 1949). The DF calls itself an "independent and non-partisan (*überparteilich*) organization that is committed to furthering peace within the existing legal framework". The *Deutsche Friedensrat* is closely linked to the GBM, and also a member of the OKV – which is not so surprising considering its origins as an official GDR institution.[102] The GBM's work group on "Peace" (*Arbeitskreis Frieden*), which simultaneously functions as the "European Peace Forum – German section" (EPF) is introduced on the GBM's website as originating from the "International Tribunal for the Condemnation of the NATO War against Yugoslavia, which, as we can see today, played a key role in the development of the imperialist policies of intervention of the USA and NATO."[103] Also attached to the *Deutscher Friedensrat* is the group "Mothers against the War" (*Mütter gegen den Krieg*). This group was likewise established in protest against the NATO bombings during the war in former Yugoslavia. Like the other anti-war organizations it understands growing Western capitalist imperialism after the decline of the socialist states as the main cause of war. In 2016, the group holds weekly anti-war pickets in east Berlin, and aims to "help to unmask the war lies of the financial and military capital".[104]

The GBM's continued involvement in Serbia underscores its understanding of socialism as a bullwark against Western imperialism, and of the GDR as an antifascist state that had overcome the legacy of the Nazi Reich: In March 2000, a GBM delegation to the "Third Slavic Tribunal" in Belgrade visited Kragujevac, the Serbian provincial town where on 20-21 October 1941 German troops killed several thousands of inhabitants in retaliation for a partisan attack on German forces.[105] The GBM visit to the local orphanage *Mladost* resulted in a long-term patronage by the GBM, which called on its members to make "monthly donations to the orphanage".[106] In later years, several GBM delegations visited *Mladost*, and

[101] John Catalinotto, "Tribunal Finds U.S./NATO Guilty of War Crimes", report on the website of *Workers World*, accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.workers.org/ww/2000/belgrade0413.php
[102] http://www.nato-tribunal.de/links.htm (accessed 2 November 2016).
[103] GBM, "Das Europäische Friedensforum. Ein Netzwerk für Verständigung und Frieden in Europa". Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.gbmev.de/ak_frieden_1.htm.
[104] Mütter gegen den Krieg Berlin-Brandenburg, "Arbeit, Brot und Völkerfrieden, das ist uns're Welt! (aus einem Lied, das in der DDR oft gesungen wurde)". Accessed 2 November 2016: http://muetter-gegen-den-krieg-berlin.de/.
[105] Estimations range from ca. 2.500 up to 7.000 citizens. The GBM sticks to this latter estimation.
[106] "Chronik der GBM e.V.: Das Jahr 2000".

the orphanage was supported with donations of money and goods (including, in 2004, a minibus). In 2003, the GBM actively supported citizens of Varvarin, a small Serbian town that was hit by NATO bombs targeting the local bridge over the Morava river on 30 May 1999, who filed a lawsuit for compensation against the German state as one of the NATO members.[107] The case was rejected by the Provincial Court in Bonn (*Bonner Landesgericht*) in October 2003; and the same happened with a subsequent complaint before the Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe.[108] In 2001, GBM-member and professional photographer Gabriele Senft documented the situation in Varvarin in photographs and statements of the local population, and subsequently organized a travelling exhibition in commemoration of the NATO attacks. The political sensitivity of this project became apparent when the provincial parliament of Thuringia cancelled the exhibition shortly before it was scheduled to take place. In the end, the photos were shown at several other places including the GBM gallery,[109] and the documentation was also published in book form.[110] Since January 2006, the GBM's work group on Solidarity (*Arbeitskreis Solidarität*) is responsible for the projects in Serbia.[111]

The GBM also called upon its members to engage in protests against the Iraq war in 2003; and in 2005 it participated in the "world tribunal on Iraq", a people's court similar in nature to the tribunals against NATO's bombings in the Kosovo war, which took place in Istanbul.[112] Protests against NATO are frequently accompanied by unquestioning loyalty towards Russia and its foreign policy, including the annexation of the Crimean peninsula and Russia's engagement in Syria. In an April 2014 letter to Russian president Vladimir Putin, the

[107] "Chronik der GBM e.V.: Das Jahr 2003". Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.gbmev.de/chrnk/GBM_Chronik_2003.htm.
[108] Vladimir Minić and Nemanja Rujević, "Die Brücke von Varvarin". In: *Deutsche Welle* (24 March 2014). Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.dw.com/de/die-br%C3%BCcke-von-varvarin/a-17512407. For a documentation of the several court appeals by (representatives of) the citizens of Varvarin, see also the website of the "NATO Tribunal", under "Projekt NATO-Kriegsopfer klagen auf Schadenersatz" (accessed 2 November 2016): http://www.nato-tribunal.de/varvarin/.
[109] "Fotodokumentation 'Die Brücke von Varvarin' von Gabriele Senft in der GBM-Galerie"; on the website of the "NATO Tribunal" (accessed 2 November 2016): http://www.nato-tribunal.de/varvarin/fotodokumentation.html.
[110] Gabriele Senft, *Die Brücke von Varvarin: Dokumentation eines NATO-Kriegsverbrechens in Jugoslawien*. (Kückenshagen: Scheunen-Verlag 2002).
[111] "Chronik der GBM e.V.: Das Jahr 2006". Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.gbmev.de/chrnk/GBM_Chronik_2006.htm.
[112] "Chronik der GBM e.V.: Das Jahr 2005". Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.gbmev.de/chrnk/GBM_Chronik_2005.htm. The website of the World Tribunal on Iraq (WTI) is no longer active, but an archive of the website until 2007, including the WTI's verdict, the "Declaration of the Jury of Conscience" (27 June 2005) can still be found at https://web.archive.org/web/20070518005936/http://www.worldtribunal.org/main/?b=91(accessed 2 November 2016).

OKV board lamented EU and US concerns over Russian involvement in Ukraine as an "unprecedented smear campaign" (*beispiellose Hetze*).[113]

Currently, the GBM seems mostly active in contributing to protests against international wars, and in particular against US-led interventions. The *European Peace Forum*/*Arbeitskreis Frieden*, as the group most directly concerned with the topic of peace within the GBM, considers itself a pacifist organization, which pleads for civil conflict prevention, especially through promoting (nuclear) disarmament and through protesting the reduction of social welfare policies (*gegen Sozialabbau*). According to its website, the EPF focusses especially on Germany's eastern neighbours (Poland, Czech Republic), and it sharply criticized the planned anti-missile shield of the Bush administration, which the EPF described as an attempt of the US to secure its hegemonic power. The group has about ten members, and is primarily active in publishing informational brochures and essays about a wide range of international topics ranging from European integration, over Iran's nuclear programme and the war in Syria, to what it sees as the "new fascism" in Germany. Interestingly, the "German section of the European Peace Forum" seems to represent the entire peace forum – and it is impossible to find other active members of this allegedly European network on the internet.[114] This again can be linked to a more generally practiced OKV strategy to look as diverse, networked, and even internationally active as possible.

Finally, a group that at first sight appears to be quite misplaced in OKV is the German "Association of Free Thinkers" (*Freidenkerverband*), which sees itself as an ideological community (*Weltanschauungsgemeinschaft*) and cultural organization representing the interest of non-religious people.[115] The organization is not tied to any specific political party, but is traditionally associated with socialist and communist movements and unions. The present *Freidenkerverband* "bases itself on the German Freethinker Association that was in 1933 prohibited and persecuted by the Nazis and is consistently antifascist."[116] After World War II, local groups of the *Deutsche Freidenkerverband* were quickly reinstated in West Germany; and in 1952 the organization was accepted into the World Union of Freethinkers. In

[113] OKV Präsidium, "An den Präsidenten der Russischen Föderation Wladimir Wladimirowitsch Putin" (Berlin, 24 April 2014). Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.okv-ev.de/Dokumente/Erklaerungen-OKV/Schreiben%20an%Putin_140424.pdf.

[114] Calnan also searched the internet for more information – and found, in 2008, that "the European Peace Forum does not have a website but is widely discussed on the internet." He found 84 hits in English – almost all also mentioning either GBM or its director, Dr. Richter. See Calnan, *The Effectiveness of Domestic Human Rights NGOS*, p. 316-7. My assumption would be that this is because they *are* the peace forum.

[115] Deutscher Freidenker Verband e.V., Landesverband Berlin, "Wir über uns. Wer sind die Freidenker und was wollen sie?" Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.berlin.freidenker.org/?page_id=372.

[116] Ibid.

the GDR, however, the political circumstances were such that the freethinkers could not reestablish themselves as an independent organization.[117] Only by June 1989, the GDR's political leaders, ostensibly spurred by the MfS (Stasi), encouraged the establishment of a GDR *Freidenker-Verband*, which included Erich Honecker as one of its first members.[118] At the time, ca. 12.000 members joined the organization. In 1991, West and East German *Freidenker* united, despite the latter's Stasi-image.[119] Only the Berlin branch of the *Freidenkerverband* is a member of the OKV. It is also a member of the "Antifascist Committee against War and Social Theft" (*Antifaschistisches Komitee gegen Krieg und Sozialraub*), an alliance that unites a host of OKV organizations with the KPD and the DKP.[120] The two members of the *Freidenkerverband* that I spoke with were also engaged in both the GBM and the DKP,[121] and several *Freidenker* publications can be obtained in the GBM's gallery.[122]

Cluster 3: Art and science

"Human rights" broadly defined remain the self-proclaimed focus of interest in the GBM. And while the issue of human rights was in fact narrowed down to a specific group of former GDR enthusiasts, it was also expanded into other fields, such as the fight against discrimination (of East Germans) and their right to work, including such issues as "the right to education" and "cultural tolerance". The latter are the GBM's framing of advocacy for the promotion and preservation of GDR art and culture.

These latter issues reflect the interest of many GBM members. Different from ISOR and the GRH, the GBM was founded by former professors at GDR universities and is much more grounded in former cultural and scientific professions. That art is understood as a central element of the GBM's work can also be seen in the awarding of the GBM's above-mentioned human rights prize, which included several GDR artists. From 1994 to 2012, the GBM issued "ICARUS", a quarterly "magazine for social theory, human rights and culture". The journal focussed on GDR art, and featured opinion pieces and background articles on antifascism and

[117] Deutscher Freidenker Verband e.V., "Aus der Geschichte der Freidenker - Tradition und Erbe". Accessed 2 November 2016:
http://www.freidenker.org/cms/dfv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=50&Itemid=61.
[118] Horst Groschopp and Eckhard Müller, *Letzter Versuch einer Offensive. Der Verband der Freidenker der DDR (1988 – 1990)* (Aschaffenburg: Alibri-Verlag 2013).
[119] Siegfried R. Krebs, "Die kurze Geschichte der DDR-Freidenker". In: *HPD* (14 January 2014).
[120] http://berlin.k-p-d.org/htdoc/antifa-komitee/antifakomitee-start.html (accessed 2 November 2016).
[121] These are Dieter Feuerstein and Eberhard Schulz.
[122] Personal observation at the GBM gallery.

peace, as well as on (GDR) equality and (FRG) welfare state policies.[123] In my interviews, many OKV members mourned the end of ICARUS: with the decline in readership it was impossible to keep the magazine afloat. Still, other journals and magazines attached to the same milieu also cover the topics that ICARUS published on, including *RotFuchs*, *Neues Deutschland* and *Junge Welt*. ICARUS' end again attests to the decline of the "former GDR milieu".

The GBM work group on culture (*Arbeitskreis Kultur;* also known as the *Freundeskreis Kunst aus der DDR*[124]) is, however, still quite active, and in the GBM's own gallery it regularly organizes theme evenings and exhibitions of artists born in the GDR.[125] As the friendly face of the OKV, the GBM also holds a separate office at the Weitlingstrasse 89 in Berlin: this representational space is open to the public, in contrast to the offices of ISOR, GRH and the OKV which are not open to outsiders, and which all are located on some of the upper floors of the *Neues Deutschland* building at Franz Mehringplatz 1.[126] Cultural evenings of the GBM and other OKV organizations are often accompanied by musical performances of the *Ernst Busch Chor*: a choir devoted to the repertoire of the socialist singer Ernst Busch and other songs of the "workers-singers-movement" (*Arbeiter-Sänger-Bewegung*).[127]

The GBM also hosts a work group entirely devoted to the organization of "cultural and educational excursions" (*Arbeitskreis Kultur- und Bildungsreisen*).[128] The trips often have an explicitly political character, but primarily they have a social function for people who like to travel in a group of politically likeminded individuals. This is very visible from their 2013 publication *Heute hier, Morgen da. Urlaubsträume unter Gleichgesinnten.*[129] In an announcement of the program for 2010, the leader of the AK, Gisbert Graff, mentioned that many people who used to travel with the AK are no longer capable of doing so because of

[123] http://www.icarus.gbmev.de/ (accessed 2 November 2016).
[124] A first work group (*Arbeitsgruppe*) on art (Kunst) was established already in January 1992; it was later renamed Arbeits*kreis Kultur*, and since 2004 is primarily known as the *Freundeskreis Kunst aus der DDR*, which is open also to people who are not members of the GBM.
[125] http://www.gbmev.de/arbeitskr/ddr.htm (accessed 2 November 2016). The first exhibition that was organized by the *Arbeitskreis Kunst* opened on 1 May 1999 and featured work of the artist Ronald Paris. "Chronik der GBM e.V.: Das Jahr 1999".
[126] This building (http://franzmehringplatz.de; accessed 2 November 2016) used to be the main office of the SED newspaper *Neues Deutschland* and hosts several left-wing organizations, including the *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung*, the scientific foundation close to *Die Linke*.
[127] "Der Chor"; at: http://www.ernstbuschchorberlin.de/der-chor.html (accessed 2 November 2016).
[128] AK Kultur- und Bildungsreisen der GBM, "Herbsttreffen" (November 2014). Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.gbmev.de/trmne/herbsttr_14.htm.
[129] GBM, *Heute hier – Morgen da. Urlaubsträume unter Gleichgesinnten* (Berlin: GBM 2013). The title of this publication is borrowed from a 1972 song of Hannes Wader, a west German chansonnier known for his engagement with the 1968 student movement. From 1977-1991, his work was largely ignored in west Germany because of his membership of the *Deutsche Kommunistische Partei* (DKP).

advanced age and poor health. Still, in 2015 the AK organized several trips within Germany, and even a trip to Belarus.[130]

The memory of the GDR's cultural and political heritage is central to the "Circle of Friends of the Palast der Republik" (*Freundeskreis Palast der Republik*; FPdR).The FPdR was founded on 10 March 2007 by the people behind the earlier citizen initiative (*Bürgerinitiative*) *Pro Palast*.[131] This initiative, which started in 1993, had as its goal to prevent the demolition of the GDR's erstwhile cultural and political centre, the *Palast der Republik*, and to find a new use for the building. Over the years, *ProPalast* organized twelve temporary exhibitions, and collected over 100.000 signatures. Nevertheless, with the start of the demolition of the building in 2007 the citizen initiative had lost its case, and transformed into the *Freundeskreis Palast der Republik* memorial association.[132]

According to Rudolf Denner and Klaus Wons, the FPdR is motivated by personal emotions; Wons in 2012 still called his years of work in the PdR "the best time of my life".[133] But the FPdR, so Denner, is also meant as "an indictment of German historiography", since the latter neglects many aspects of the GDR "which were there, and cannot simply be denied."[134] To this end, the FPdR re-staged popular programs of the former *Palast*'s cultural agenda.[135] Moreover, the FPdR collects materials related to the PdR as well as to the PdR's demolition. This documentation is presented in yearly temporary exhibitions, in a continuation of the earlier activities of the *Bürgerinitiative Pro Palast*. Materials can also be purchased on cd or in the form of books produced by the FPdR.[136] The FPdR also fights against the prestigious reconstruction of the façade of the Hohenzollern imperial "Berlin City Castle" (*Berliner Stadtschloss*) that earlier stood at its place on the former *Schloßplatz*, and that Honecker had torn down to construct the GDR Palace of the Republic. For this purpose it petitions *Bundestag* politicians, and publishes on the expected costs of the new construction plans. Exhibitions of the FPdR are supported, financially and with exhibition space, by the

[130] "Aus der Arbeit des Vorstandes". In: *Akzente. Monatszeitung der Gesellschaft zum Schutz von Bürgerrecht und Menschenwürde e.V.*, 195 (2015), p. 1. Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.gbmev.de/akznte/akzente_Zeitung_09-15_web.pdf
[131] http://pro.palast.com/ (accessed 2 November 2016).
[132] "Mitteilungen der Kommunistischen Plattform der Linkspartei.PDS: Freundeskreis Palast der Republik gegründet" (April 2007): http://archiv2007.sozialisten.de/politik/publikationen/kpf-mitteilungen/view_ html?zid=35521&bs=1&n=11. See also a press announcement by the newly founded FPdR: http://www.okv-ev.de/Dokumente/uebrige%20Vereine/Presseinfo%20zum%20%20Freundeskreis%20090414 %282%29.pdf (both accessed 2 November 2016).
[133] Interview with Rudolf Denner and Klaus Wons (10 July 2012). For his biography see chapter two.
[134] Interview with Rudolf Denner and Klaus Wons (10 July 2012).
[135] See the website of the FPdR: http://www.palastschaustelle.eu/ (accessed 2 November 2016).
[136] Again in continuation of the earlier work of *ProPalast*: http://pro.palast.com/; http://www.palastschaustelle.eu/links.html (both accessed 2 November 2016).

leftist newspapers *Neues Deutschland* and *Neue Welt*, as well as by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, a foundation connected to *Die Linke*. Rudolf Denner, who is also a board member of the OKV and engaged in the *Freundeskreis Ernst Thälmann Gedenkstätte* (see below), is also an active member of *Die Linke*, and uses his political contacts for his work in the FPdR.[137]

The coverage that the FPdR obtained in the media was larger and more positive than that of other OKV organizations, in spite of the fact that the FPdR is only a very small organization. While FPdR claims to have around 150 members, Wons and Denner readily admitted that only a handful of those were active, and that meetings of the organization are less characterized by action than by socializing.[138]

Another initiative aimed at preserving the memory of the GDR through its cultural heritage is the "Memorial Library of the GDR". The organization understands its aims as "the promotion of art and culture" through the collection of literary testimonies written in GDR times.[139] The *Erinnerungsbibliothek* was established in 2012 with support from the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung; and in 2013 it was partly sponsored by the provincial factions (*Landtagsfraktion*) of *Die Linke* in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Sachsen-Anhalt.[140] The *Erinnerungsbibliothek* wants to preserve memories of the GDR in order to contribute to the "objective, historically-critical" historiography of the GDR.[141] Its collection has recently been transferred to the federal archives (*Bundesarchiv*) in Berlin-Lichterfelde.

Cluster 4: Historical memory

In chapter two, I discussed how the network of OKV organizations enables activists to continue their political understandings of both past and present through the prism of GDR-inspired socialist ideology. Unsurprisingly, we also find in the OKV many organizations specifically devoted to promoting and preserving the historical memory of the GDR. These organizations employ a variety of methods, which range from travel, sight-seeing, and sociability over exhibitions, museums, documentary publications and public "commissions of inquiry" to aggressive street demonstrations. One historical anchor of this cluster of

[137] Interview with Rudolf Denner and Klaus Wons (10 July 2012).
[138] Ibid.
[139] "Satzung des Vereins 'Erinnerungsbibliothek DDR'", § 2.1. Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.erinnerungsbibliothek-ddr.de/satzung.pdf.
[140] See "Spenderliste 2012" and "Spenderliste 2013" at: http://www.erinnerungsbibliothek-ddr.de/uns.htm.
[141] http://www.erinnerungsbibliothek-ddr.de/uns.htm.

associations is the personality of Ernst Thälmann, the KPD leader who was arrested and eventually killed by the Nazis.

One organization centering on this personality is the "Circle of Friends of the Ernst Thälmann Memorial in Ziegenhals" (*Freundeskreis "Ernst-Thälmann-Gedenkstätte" Ziegenhals; FETG*), founded on 2 May 1990.[142] Its site of remembrance is the *Sporthaus Ziegenhals*, which served as the bar where the KPD Central Committee had a secret meeting on 7 February 1933, just a week after Hitler came to power. In his *Ziegenhalser Rede* (speech), Thälmann analysed the new political situation in Germany, called for resistance against the regime, and talked about the necessity for a communist state to be formed after the end of the Hitler regime. Thälmann's arrest followed on 3 March 1933, and in August 1944 Hitler had him executed in the Buchenwald concentration camp. The antifascist struggle being one of the central founding myths of the GDR, Ernst Thälmann was celebrated as its greatest hero. The GDR's pioneer youth organization was named after him, and children learned about his life through educational books and films. The former *Sporthaus Ziegenhals* became a museum to commemorate the illegal KPD meeting as well as the communist victims of Hitler.

After 1989-90, the *Treuhandgesellschaft* took over the Ernst Thälmann memorial, which until then was property of the GDR Trade Organization.[143] The *Freundeskreis* has been organizing public activities around the memorial, including annual demonstrations on the day of the secret KPD meeting (7 February) as well as on Thälmann's birthday and the day he was executed.[144] Celebrations took place in the large hall of the memorial, and the former museum premises could still be visited in small guided groups of the *Freundeskreis*.[145] But on 30 November 2002 the *Sporthaus Ziegenhals* site was auctioned, and in the summer of 2003 it was closed. Since 2003, all memorial activities take place in front of the former memorial, partly in its courtyard. In May 2010 the new owner, Gerd Gröger, had the building torn down. The *Freundeskreis* organized protests and a larger demonstration in Potsdam, and filed a constitutional complaint (*Landesverfassungsklage*) as well as two emergency protection requests, which however remained without result.[146] The *Freundeskreis* also protests against the person of Gerd Gröger, for instance during a public lecture he gave at the Humboldt

[142] FETG, "Satzung", §. 2.2. Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.etg-ziegenhals.de/Satzung.html. The FETG was registered as an organization (e.V.) in 1994.
[143] "Der Freundeskreis 'Ernst-Thälmann-Gedenkstätte' e.V., Ziegenhals". Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.etg-ziegenhals.de/Der_Freundeskreis.html.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.

University on 6 May 2010.[147] Other protests have been held in front of the former memorial as well as in its direct vicinity.

Although the *Freundeskreis* remains committed to its initial goal of re-opening the memorial in its original form, personal conversations with its members revealed that they have little hope.[148] Inspired by board member Rudolf Denner, they borrowed from the agenda of the *Freundeskreis Palast der Republik* and prepared a travelling exhibition as well as a more permanent "original exhibition" near Strausberg to document the demolition and to win support for the resurrection of the museum; [149] for this exhibition they obtained, in August 2011, the complete inventory of the former museum.[150] The *Freundeskreis* also published two volumes of speeches held since 1994 at the memorial by representatives of different leftist and antifascist organizations as well as left political parties (*Die Linke*, KPD, DKP).[151]

In 2013, the *Freundeskreis* celebrated their biggest success so far with the inauguration of a memorial stone in the village of Ziegenhals.[152] Present at the event were Ernst Thälmann's granddaughter, Vera Dehle, and the son of Albert Kuntz, as relatives of participants to the 1933 meeting, next to politicians from *Die Linke* and the DKP, representatives from the Czech communist youth organization SMKČ and from the journal *Junge Welt*.[153]

Equally committed to the anti-fascist and revolutionary legacy of the famous KPD leader is the "Revolutionary Frienship Circle Ernst Thälmann and Comrades" (*Revolutionärer Freundschaftsbund Ernst Thälmann und Kameraden*; RFB), which was founded in 1995 in Dresden, with support from Thälmann's daughter Irma Gabel-Thälmann.[154] The acronym of the group, RFB, is consciously modelled on that of the *Rote Frontkämpferbund* (RFB), the protection and defence organization of the KPD in the Weimar Republic.[155]

The RFB has a German and a Czech section, with a common board. The goals of the RFG are the "promotion of international understanding, and the study of, care for and

[147] Interview with Max Renkl, 8 November 2012.
[148] Interview with Max Renkl, 8 November 2012; interview with Siegfried Mechler and Rudolf Denner, 8 November 2012.
[149] "Aktuelles aus der Arbeit des Freundeskreises", in: *Ziegenhalser Info-Rundbrief* (August 2012), p.3.
[150] http://www.etg-ziegenhals.de/Der_Freundeskreis.html.
[151] *Die Ziegenhalser Reden*, Band I und II: http://www.etg-ziegenhals.de/Die_Ziegenhalser_Reden.html.
[152] "80 Jahre illegale Tagung des ZK der KPD, 60 Jahre Ernst-Thälmann-Gedenkstätte. Impressionen eines erfolgreiches Wochenendes": http://www.etg-ziegenhals.de/Kundgebung_Februar_2013.html.
[153] Ibid.
[154] See the RFB website: http://www.rfb-online.org/.
[155] This is not explicitly stated, but can be understood from the explanation on the *Rote Frontkämpferbund* on the website of the *Revolutionärer Freundschaftsbund*, under the title "Geschichte des RFB": http://www.rfb-online.org/geschichte-d.shtml.

preservation of progressive experiences and traditions of the German and international labour movement."[156] According to the RFB, "truly humane social relations are in the end only possible through democratic and fundamental changes in the [existing] social structures." But the group's main activities are social and recreational.[157] The activities and interests of the RFB seem to be broad, left-wing issues: they protest government policies on welfare issues and the war in Afghanistan, and together with other OKV groups they participate in the maintenance of several commemorative events which used to be celebrated in the GDR. The RFB publishes two information magazines, *Der Rote Aufbau*, as a common information paper of the organization, and the *Roter Sturm*, as "the counterpart to bourgeois-imperialist propaganda".[158] The RFB actively seeks cooperation and association with likeminded organizations, and is a member of the *Europäisches Friedensforum, deutsche Sektion* (itself part of the GBM), the *Freundeskreis Ernst-Thälmann-Gedenkstätte Ziegenhal*s e.V. (member of the OKV), the *Kommunistisches Aktionsbündnis Dresden* and the OKV itself. Chair of the RFB is Gerd Hommel. In 2008, the organization had 49 German and 24 Czech members.

One of the main activities of the organization comprises the support of the meetings in Malá Úpa, which are organized by the OKV group "Initiative Traditional Meeting [in] Malá Upá" (*Initiativgruppe Traditionstreffen Malá Upá*). This latter association is a continuation of a group that already existed in GDR times, since 1972, to link back to nine meetings of German and Czech communists between 1922 and 1933 in the Czech border village of Malá Úpa (today near the German and Polish borders). In 1927, Ernst Thälmann participated in the meeting; and the last meeting of 1933, after the *Reichtagsbrand* in Germany, was used to arrange the escape of several German communists from Germany. The *Initiativgruppe* sees these historical meetings as "highlights of the Czech-German cooperation of leftists".[159]

In the late socialist period the meetings combined an ideological program with "love for nature and sports activities" for youth, with up to 2.000 visitors in the 1980s and with Czech, and even Russian and Polish delegations.[160] After the *Wende*, the number of visitors

[156] See the RFB website: http://www.rfb-online.org/ (accessed 2 November 2016).
[157] See "Der RFB vorgestellt: Aus der Antragstellung zur Aufnahme in das OKV" (2008): http://www.okv-ev.de/.
[158] On the RFB website, under "Publikationen": http://www.rfb-online.org/aufbau-d.shtml.
[159] Ernst Wanitschek, "Dokumentation zu den Tschechisch-Deutschen Riesengebirgstreffen in den Jahren 1922-1933 sowie über Internationale Traditionstreffen ab 1972 in Malá Úpa and der Schneekoppe" (14 March 2007), p. 2. Accessed 2 November 2016:
http://www.okv-ev.de/Dokumente/Mitglieder_html/IG%20Traditionstreffen%20Mala%20Upa.pdf.
[160] Ibid., p. 3.

shrank to around 100 Germans in 2011,[161] most of them elderly. While participants are motivated by ideological concerns (commemoration, talking about socialist solutions for current political problems),[162] these meetings also function as a group excursion of likeminded people (similar to the AK *Kultur- und Bildungsreisen* of the GBM). Several people even attended the meeting as part of a bustour-package of several days in the Riesengebirge.[163] Currently, the meetings seem to be mainly a German affair, with the participation of the local Trutnov branch of the Czech communist party (KSČM) and a communist "Czech Borderland Club" (*Klub des Tschechischen Grenzlandes*), as well as a number of Polish communists. Participants from Germany stem from different socialist organizations, including the radical left parties DKP, KPD and *Die Linke*, as well as from the OKV groups.[164]

Another OKV organization directly linked to memorial sites of the antifascist struggle against Hitler is the "Residence and Holiday Resort Heideruh", a holiday and conference center near Hamburg (in the "old" part of the FRG). *Heideruh* was established in 1945 by anti-fascists as a holiday home in which survivors of the Hitler regime as well as Nazi victims' children, relatives and friends could "recuperate and restore their strength to fight for a better society".[165] Again, "antifascism" is limited to leftists, in the same way the term was used in the GDR and remains in use among OKV members. *Heideruh* continued to offer affordable accommodation, which is possible due to the use of volunteers. The resort's activity calendar includes meetings with a local VVN-BdA chapter, a volunteer week to maintain the *Heideruh* premise (advertised, in the good old socialist tradition, as a *subotnik*), and a theme weekend on Chile (called *El Pueblo Unido*).[166] And again, a strong link is made between the history of socialist /communist antifascism and contemporary political agendas. Since 2011, *Heideruh* also organizes yearly international antifascist youth camps, in which participants from different (Eastern) European countries learn about the history of Nazism and

[161] For the number of participants before 1989, see ibid, p. 8. I have estimated the number of participants in 2011 based on the welcome speech of that year's meeting: "Begrüßungsrede vor den Teilnehmern des jährlichen internationalen Freundschaftstreffens am 27. August 2011 in Mala Upa", available online at: http://www.grenztruppen-der-ddr.de/podium2/viewtopic.php?f=116&t=2991&view=next (accessed 2 November 2016).
[162] Wanitschek, "Dokumentation zu den Tschechisch-Deutschen Riesengebirgstreffen", p. 3.
[163] "Begrüßungsrede vor den Teilnehmern des jährlichen internationalen Freundschaftstreffens am 27. August 2011 in Mala Upa".
[164] Including VVN-BdA and *Revolutionären Freundschaftsbundes*; the German *Freidenkerverband*; *RotFuchs-Förderverein*; the GRH, and the remnants of the GDR youth organization *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (FDJ).
[165] "Informationen über Heideruh": http://heideruh.de/informationen.html (accessed 2 November 2016).
[166] A list of "Heideruher Termine 2012", at the website of the holiday home: http://heideruh.de/programm.html.

antifascism, besides engaging in excursions and practical work for the holiday home.[167] This camp is supported by several organizations, including the Auschwitz Committee, but also by the *Linke*-affiliated *Minna Fasshauer-Stiftung* and *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung* Niedersachsen, as well as by local companies and individual speakers.[168] *Heideruh* has contacts with several memorial sites commemorating the victims of fascism, as well as with several leftist organizations, including *Die Linke* and several OKV associations.[169] The centre also hosts a local antifascist youth group,[170] and has since 2013 been engaged in actions and activities to support refugees.[171]

The primary link between *Heideruh* and the OKV is Matthias Werner, the current OKV president. Although Werner himself resides in Berlin, he became active on the board of *Heideruh* after a visit to the location with his local chapter of *Die Linke* in 2006.[172]

Heideruh is also closely connected to the *Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes – Bund deutscher Antifaschisten* (VVN-BdA), the largest organization that is closely connected to "historical antifascism" against the Nazis – and which in East Germany remains closely affiliated to the GDR's official antifascist narrative. The Association of Persons Persecuted by the Nazi Regime (*Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes*, VVN) was founded in Berlin in 1948. Although initially open to all German citizens, the association was soon known for being close to the communist leadership of the Soviet sector. In the Federal Republic of Germany the VVN was marginalized as a communist organization but became publicly active again in 1976, sponsored by the SED. In East Germany, the VVN was already in 1953 replaced with a new organization under more direct leadership of the SED, the *Komitee der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer in der DDR* (Committee of Antifascist Resistance Fighters in the GDR). The two antifascist organizations merged only in 2002, to form the VVN-BdA.[173] In East Germany, several local VVN-BdA chapters fight against the dismantling of specific GDR antifascist memorial sites, including those connected to Ernst Thälmann.

[167] Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, "Jugendcamp in Heideruh", http://www.rosalux.de/event/43897/jugendcamp-in-heideruh.html (accessed 2 November 2016).
[168] http://heideruh.de/neuigkeiten.htm.
[169] For a list, see under "links" at the Heideruh website: http://heideruh.de/links.html.
[170] "Arbeitskreis Jugend-Antifa-Heideruh": http://heideruh.de/jugendgruppe.html.
[171] "Refugees": http://heideruh.de/refugees.html.
[172] Interview with Matthias Werner, 8 May 2013. Werner has since then left *Die Linke*.
[173] The VVdN-BdA is a member of the *Fédération Internationale des Résistants - Association antifasciste* (International Federation of Resistance Fighters – Association of Anti-fascists), which comprises socialist organizations from 20 countries in Europe and Israel.

Until 2015 OKV listed VVN-BdA as one of its members, but this affiliation was never stated on the website of the VVN/BdA itself. We must assume that the contacts between OKV and VVN-BdA rested on the personal contacts of specific board members, rather than on the explicit endorsement of the VVN-BdA as a whole. At the same time, several smaller organizations that are part of the VVN-BdA's own network remain closely affiliated to the OKV. These include *Heideruh* as well as several groups that were formed by former prisoners of Nazi concentration camps in East Germany, especially the *Lagerarbeitsgemeinschaft (Camp work group) Buchenwald Dora* (LAG BW-Dora).[174]

Alongside the cluster of antifascist left associations in OKV there is another group of organizations that is concerned with the memory and propagation of other aspects of GDR history and historiography. One of the first of this kind was the "Alternative Commission of Inquiry into German Contemporary History" (*Alternative Enquête Kommission Deutsche Zeitgeschichte*). Founded in 1992 by Wolfgang Harich, this group was a reaction to the German Bundestag's *Enquête Kommission Deutsche Zeitgeschichte,* which had as its goal to formulate an official all-German evaluation of the GDR past. In analogy to the *Enquête Komission* of the *Bundestag*, the *Alternative Enquête Kommission Deutsche Zeitgeschichte* organized a number of public hearings on GDR history. Harich and several others argued that the official Bundestag Committee started from the premise that the GDR had been a "wrong" state; and indeed, its work led the Bundestag to conclude that the GDR had been an *Unrechtsstaat*, much to the chagrin of the "Ost milieu" represented in the OKV. The few PDS members in the *Enquête Kommission* had no influence on the outcome, so that the PDS supported the *Alternative Enquête Kommission* of Harich, who at the time was a KPD member (but joined the PDS in 1994). The extra-parliamentarian KPD and DKP equally supported Harich's alternative commission.

From its conception, the AEK was closely connected to other East-German initiatives that would become part of the OKV. Between 1994 and 1996 the association was directed by Siegfried Prokop, a former professor of contemporary history at the Humboldt University (1983-1996) whom we already encountered as one of GBM's founding fathers.[175] Under Prokop, the AEK was renamed *Berliner Alternatives Geschichtsforum* (BAG), and lost members. Its focus remains on the critique of the current historiography of the GDR: "There is a close relation between past and present, historical image and politics, historical

[174] Interview with Wolf Stötzel, 27 November 2013.
[175] Since 2006 Prokop is a board member of Brandenburg section of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, the political foundation of *Die Linke*.

propaganda and capital's interests. The evaluation of history has never been impartial; but today it is less impartial than ever."[176] The *Berliner Alternatives Geschichtsforum* remains closely related to the GBM,[177] and most of its members hail from the same milieu of former GDR academics.[178] The BAG's long-term speaker Gerhard Fischer (1930-2013) was also very active for the GBM, the VVN-BdA, and other "East-organizations", including the "German-Polish Society" (*Deutsch-Polnische Gesellschaft*), and the "Society of Friends of Russia's Peoples" (*Verein der Freunde der Völker Russlands*).[179]

An "alternative history" is also presented by the *DDR-Kabinett Bochum*, a GDR museum in the Ruhr area in West Germany. Although the museum's self-proclaimed goal is to show the GDR in its entirety, a description of the collection includes mainly themes connected to the state and military:

> The collection covers the areas of popular culture, state organizations and parties, the armed forces and the civil institutions of the GDR. It presents the role of Berlin as a "front city" in the Cold War, as well as the origins and the roles of GDR districts. Also a number of very special buildings (*herauszuhebende Bauten*), such as the Berlin TV tower and the Palace of the Republic, will be appreciated (*gewürdigt*). Especially the Palace of the People is a showpiece of the shameful way in which [the FRG] has dealt with the GDR's cultural property.[180]

The DDR-Kabinett in Bochum, as "an honest picture of the GDR",[181] is the project of Andreas Maluga, a DKP functionary who is also a member of many other organizations that are directly or indirectly linked to the OKV, including the *RotFuchs-Förderverein*, the *Initiativgruppe zur Rehabilitierung der Opfer des Kalten Krieges* (IROKK), and the *Lagerarbeitsgemeinschaft Buchenwald/Dora*. His links with the "Ost-milieu" are thus very strong, and so is his admiration for the socialist secret services. Maluga's personal facebook page states that his favorite quote is Feliks Dzerzhinskii's famous motto that "a Chekist needs a cold head, a hot heart, and clean hands".[182] The website of the DDR Kabinett also offers a selection of greetings addressed to the museum by GDR celebrities like Margot Honecker,

[176] Gerhard Fischer, "Bilanz über 15 Jahre staatliche Einheit" (2005). Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.okv-ev.de/Dok_Kolloquium/fischer_bilanz%2015%20jahre%20staatliche%20einheit.htm.
[177] BAG, "Erklärung zum 50. Jahrestag des 17. Juni 1953" (February 2003). Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.mfs-insider.de/Erkl/170653.htm
[178] Among the 29 signatories of the BAG's "Erklärung zum 50. Jahrestag des 17. Juni 1953" only eight have no academic title.
[179] Thomas Willms, "Er war Mitbegründer des Bundes der Antifaschisten in der DDR. Gerhard Fischer verstorben". In: *VVN-BdA, Aus dem Verband vom Rhein zur Oder* (September / October 2013), p. 1.
[180] DDR Kabinett Bochum, "Die DDR im Ruhrgebiet? Warum? Weshalb? Wofür? ": http://www.ddr-kabinett-bochum.de/warum-weshalb-wofür/ (accessed 2 November 2016).
[181] Ibid.
[182] https://www.facebook.com/andreas.maluga (accessed 2 November 2016).

Egon Krenz, and GDR astronaut Sigmund Jähn, next to the greetings of former ambassadors, NVA officers, and the head of the foreign intelligence department of the MfS.[183]

A similar group, yet more focussed in its scope, is the "Free German Trade Unions Foundation to Support the History of the German Trade Union Movement" (VFDG). This association has as its goal to "contribute to the development of the trade union movement in the FRG and internationally" by extolling the achievements of the GDR *Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* (Free German Trade Union; FDGB) and its Western counterpart, the *Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*.[184] The VFDG is a work group of a handful of activists who publish "chronicles" of the FDGB and its youth work,[185] and organize public discussions. The organization is chaired by GDR-time professor of modern history and PDS activist Horst Schneider, who is also the author of several strongly polemical books against Hubertus Knabe, the director of the memorial at the former Stasi investigative prison at Berlin Hohenschönhausen.[186]

A more activist group of the history cluster of OKV associations is "Undiscovered Country" (*Unentdecktes Land*; UL), which was established in 2014. The OKV board celebrates the advent of *Unentdecktes Land* as a success in reaching out to a younger generation.[187] Indeed, the members of the group are younger than the OKV average, but the group was founded by three activists of the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (FDJ), the former youth organization of the GDR that was marginalized after 1989, but continues to exist as a small antifascist organization.[188] They had previously organized a portable "GDR exhibition" (*DDR Ausstellung*), which they now hope to continue with *Unentdecktes Land*.[189] Like other OKV organizations, *Unentdecktes Land* praises the GDR as the "greatest achievement of the

[183] "Grussworte": http://www.ddr-kabinett-bochum.de/grussworte/. Werner Grossman, former head of the foreign intelligence department (HVA) of the MfS, is also actively engaged with the OKV.
[184] FVDG, *Gründungsdokument*. Accessed 2 November 2016:
http://okv-ev.de/Dokumente/Mitglieder_html/VFDG_Gruendung.pdf
[185] Karlheinz Kuba (ed.), *Chronik des FDGB : die Schlussphase des FDGB und die Schaffung von Strukturen des DGB im Osten Deutschlands; 1987 bis 1991* (Berlin: VFDG 2013); Werner Koch (ed.), *Chronik zur Jugendarbeit des Freien Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes (FDGB) von 1945 bis 1989 / Teil 2* (Berlin: VFDG 2013).
[186] Horst Schneider, *Das Gruselkabinett des Dr. Knabe(lari)* (Berlin: Spotless 2011); Horst Schneider, *Hysterische Historiker: vom Sinn und Unsinn eines verordneten Geschichtsbildes: eine Streitschrift wider bestimmte Totalitarismusforscher, DDRologen und Renegaten* (Berlin: Verlag Wiljo Heinen 2007); Horst Schneider, *Schwarz-Rot-Goldene Worte: was Politiker der "Wiedervereinigung" gewollt und versprochen haben* (Berlin: Verlag Wiljo Heinen 2009).
[187] Conversation with Siegfried Mechler, 12 December 2013; interview with Matthias Werner, 8 May 2015.
[188] See the FDJ's website at: http://fdj.de/ (accessed 2 November 2016). Obviously, the OKV is well aware of this. When I asked Matthias Werner if this was indeed a new pacifist group, as he seemed to suggest, he admitted that "it is rather ... [originated] from the rudiments of the FDJ." Interview with Matthias Werner, 8 May 2015.
[189] "Hier entsteht die Internet-Präsenz der Ausstellung des Unentdecktes Land e.V. ": http://www.unentdecktes-land.org/die-ausstellung (accessed 2 November 2016).

German workers movement".[190] Their first action consisted of protesting the 25th anniversary of opening the German border: on East Berlin's central *Alexanderplatz* they unfolded a street-long banner with the slogan "This border has been abolished so that we together go to war again."[191] Other protest actions target the present-day German *Bundeswehr*, by depicting it as a continuation of the Third Reich *Wehrmacht*.[192] The above-mentioned banner was again used in demonstrations against the 2015 celebration of the Day of German Unity (3 October) and on 13 August 2016, on the anniversary of the erection of the Berlin Wall.[193] This gave them some publicity: both Hubertus Knabe and Beatrix von Storch (of the radical right party *Alternative für Deutschland*) condemned UL's celebration of the building of the Berlin Wall and emphasized that the GDR border cost many lives.[194] Despite the doubtful media attention that *Unentdecktes Land* generates with its highly polemical "protests", the organization is obviously rather marginal: the latest action of 13 August 2016 failed to attract more than 50 sympathizers.[195]

Cluster 5: Associations of GDR traditions

Even more limited in scope are groups connected to the history and heritage of one specific GDR institution. Such clubs are usually organized by former functionaries as a place to share memories and re-live experiences of the past. They largely have a social function, not dissimilar from the reunions of graduation classes elsewhere. The main difference is, of course, that here again the experiences of the past are linked to the ideological program of the GDR, as the state in which these experiences were made.

This cluster includes two associations that cherish military traditions, one focusing on the heritage of a GDR highschool, and a group that fill the niche of professional GDR sports, as well as all four GRH work groups that are organized around former occupations of their members.

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[190] "Satzung des »Unentdecktes Land e.V.« Berlin, 21.3.2015", § 2: http://www.unentdecktes-land.org/satzung

[191] "Diese Grenze wurde aufgehoben, damit wir gemeinsam wieder in den Krieg ziehen." See the report on the website of *Unentdecktes Land*, under "9.November 2014 · Berlin Alexanderplatz": http://www.unentdecktes-land.org/9-november-2014.

[192] "Dank euch, Soldaten der Anti-Hitler-Koalition. Nieder mit der Bundeswehr und ihren Auftraggebern": http://www.unentdecktes-land.org/8-mai-2015.

[193] http://www.unentdecktes-land.org/3-oktober-2015; http://www.unentdecktes-land.org/13-august-2016. This demonstration was organized together with *RotFuchs Förderverein*.

[194] "AfD-Politikerin von Storch: Mauerverharmloser sind 'erbärmlicher Haufen'". In: *Junge Freiheit* (4 August 2016): https://jungefreiheit.de/politik/deutschland/2016/afd-politikerin-von-storch-mauerverharmloser-sind-erbaermlicher-haufen/. See also: "Stellungnahme des Unentdecktes Land e.V. zu Hubertus Knabe und Beatrix von Storch (AfD)": http://www.unentdecktes-land.org/13-august-2016.

[195] http://www.unentdecktes-land.org/13-august-2016.

The largest organizations of this cluster stem from the GDR military. One organization of this kind is the *Traditionsverband Nationale Volksarmee* (Traditional Club of the National People's Army – Soldiers for Peace); it was founded in December 2008 with the lofty goal to use the experiences of the GDR armed forces for securing peace in Europe, for "shaping a socially and ecologically peaceful present and future".[196] Its membership primarily exists of former members of the NVA and other GDR armed forces, but the organization claims that it is also open "friends and sympathisers". By calling itself a "*Traditionsverband*" the organization places itself into a longer German tradition of clubs and associations that goes back to the nineteenth century; it wants to preserve the "progressive German traditions", and claims to embody the spirit of a German tradition of fighting "against oppression", which they identify with the antifascist resistance against Hitler and the peaceful NVA contribution to the Warsaw Pact.[197] It should be note here that the originally West German *Bundeswehr* also has an official veteran organization. Although NVA members can technically join this association, they are treated with suspicion and classified as foreign soldiers.[198] This adds insult to injury to former NVA soldiers, who at the same time continue to see the *Bundeswehr* as a foreign army – and even as the continuation of the Nazi Wehrmacht.[199] The *Traditionsverband* makes use of the same offices as the GRH, and their membership overlaps to a significant extent. It joins both GRH and ISOR in demanding an end to the "criminalization, denigration, discrimination and exclusion" of former GDR nomenclature.[200]

Yet what makes the *Trationsverband* peculiar is its explicit goal to foster the NVA traditions, including military customs, ranks and titles; it thus keeps the former NVA environment intact for its members. In March 2011, the *Traditionsverband* caused upheaval when around one hundred former NVA soldiers met in the Café of the Berlin Friedrichsfelde Zoo, to celebrate the 55th anniversary of the NVA, with former GDR army general and security minister Heinz Kessler giving a speech. The innkeeper of the café was afterwards reprimanded by the zoo director, who maintained that "the supporters of dictatorship should not get a place for their meetings here." The Union of Associations of Victims of Communist Tyranny (*Union der Opferverbände kommunistischer Gewaltherrschaft*) as well as several

[196] Traditionsverband,"Aufgaben und Ziele". Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.tvnva.de/aufgaben_ziele.html.
[197] Traditionsverband,"Aufgaben und Ziele".
[198] Andrew Bickford, *Fallen Elites. The Military Other in Post-Unification Germany* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2011), pp. 120-1; 211-12.
[199] Obviously, this in turn enables former NVA soldiers to see themselves as "victims of unification and the Third Reich" (Bickford, *Fallen Elites*, p. 212); thus continuing the image of an ongoing battle between capitalism and antifascism, as discussed in chapter two.
[200] TNVA, "Satzung 2016", §. 2.3: http://www.tvnva.de/satzung.html

local politicians criticized the event.[201] Berlin's constitutional protection service (*Verfassungsschutz*) however concluded that the *Traditionsverband NVA* was "harmless", and acted within the confines of the law. [202] This was less obvious on 9 May 2013, when around fifty *Traditionsverband*-members wore their NVA uniforms when joining the yearly ceremony in honour of fallen Soviet soldiers in World War II.[203] Five members of the *Traditionsverband's* work group "Honour Formation" *(AG Ehrenformation)*, which organizes the uniformed tributes of the *Traditionsverband*,[204] were subsequently prosecuted for violating the ban against wearing uniforms at political demonstrations; yet the case was closed in October 2015, without acquittal and without punishment.[205] To Hans Fischer, previously *Traditionsverband* president and one of the five people charged, this was a bitter victory: "A closed case is only a second-class acquittal."[206]

The "AG Museum" of the *Traditionsverband* also hosts a "Museum of Comradery-in-Arms" (*Museum der Waffenbrüderschaft*) in Garzau, close to Berlin – with the goal of documenting the history of the NVA and of the armies of other Warsaw pact states. Here, all kinds of paraphernalia related to the former NVA are collected.[207] This is not the only museum of this kind; there is, for instance, a similar "NVA museum" that was set up and sponsored by a former NVA officer in the KulturKunststatt Prora on Rügen Island.[208]

In January 2013 one group within the *Traditionsverband* split from the rest, and set up the "Association for the Maintenance of the Traditions of the National People's Army and the Border Troops of the GDR" (VPT), as a "politically independent, democratic, antifascist and

[201] Jörn Hasselmann and Christoph Stollowsky, "Aufmarsch einer Geistertruppe: Empörung über NVA Feier im Tierpark". In: *Der Tagesspiegel* (7 March 2011). Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/empoerung-ueber-nva-feier-im-tierpark/3921350.html.
[202] Stefan Jacobs, "DDR Vergangenheit: Verfassungsschutz: NVA-Verein ist harmlos". In: *Der Tagesspiegel* (8 March 2011). Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/ddr-vergangenheit-verfassungsschutz-nva-verein-ist-harmlos/3924912.html.
[203] Sven Goldmann and Torsten Hampel, "Wegen Aufmarsch vorm Sowjetischen Ehrenmal Verfahren gegen Träger von NVA-Uniformen eingestellt". In: *Der Tagesspiegel* (20 October 2015). Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/wegen-aufmarsch-vorm-sowjetischen-ehrenmal-verfahren-gegen-traeger-von-nva-uniformen-eingestellt/12476206.html.
[204] http://www.traditionsverband-nva.de/ag_ehrenformation.html (accessed 2 November 2016).
[205] Notably, these men were not prosecuted for wearing NVA uniforms, as this in itself does not constitute a crime. They were however prosecuted for wearing similar clothing as an expression of a common political opinion in a demonstration.
[206] Goldmann and Hampel, "Wegen Aufmarsch vorm Sowjetischen Ehrenmal Verfahren gegen Träger von NVA-Uniformen eingestellt".
[207] http://www.traditionsverband-nva.de/ag_museum.html; https://www.facebook.com/Museum-der-Waffenbrüderschaft-Garzau-738239376194522/?ref=page_internal (both accessed 2 November 2016).
[208] http://www.kulturkunststatt.de/nva.html (accessed 2 November 2016).

anti-military association".[209] The VPT currently has 11 regional groups spread over East Germany, and has a similar agenda of maintaining traditions, monuments, and festivities.[210] All members are presented with a military rank ("out of service"; a.D.), and statements and correspondences are signed accordingly. [211]

Yet the VPT seems to have a more assertive agenda, and criticizes the *Traditionsverband* for shortcomings in propagating the "historical legitimation of the GDR and its armed bodies". "Without attention to the values and ideals to be perpetuated, we cannot initiate any process of [public] identification [with GDR and NVA]."[212] The association wants to preserve and maintain the valuable revolutionary and humanist heritage, to protect it from distortions and errors, and to contribute to the legitimacy of being a soldier (*Legimation des Soldatseins*) in the GDR."[213] This includes, amongst other things, placing the establishment of the NVA into the contexts of post-war Europe and the Cold War tensions.[214] The *Traditionsverband* is presented as focusing only on the preservation of peace, while, in the more assertive reading of the VPT, the primary task of the NVA was the protection of the socialist people's power (*Arbeiter- und Bauernmacht*).[215] Socialism is an "anti-imperialist liberation- and peace movement",[216] which seemingly puts equal emphasis on struggle and on peace.

But differences should not be overemphasized. Like the *Traditionsverband*, the VPT is closely connected to the GRH, and also cooperates with ISOR. Both organizations speak out against NATO expansion in Eastern Europe.[217] They also call for the "equal treatment" of all

[209] Verband zur Pflege der Traditionen der Nationalen Volksarmee und der Grenztruppen der DDR e.V., "Satzung vom 26. 01. 2013". Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.vtnvagt.de/index.php/der-verband.
[210] Horst Kerzig, "Zur Traditionsarbeit im Verband zur Pflege der Traditionen der Nationalen Volksarmee und der Grenztruppen der DDR". Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.vtnvagt.de/index.php/traditionslinien/210-zur-traditionsarbeit-im-verband-zur-pflege-der-traditionen-der-nationalen-volksarmee-und-der-grenztruppen-der-ddr.
[211] "Der gewählte Vorstand": http://www.vtnvagt.de/index.php/der-vorstand
[212] "Ohne Kenntnisnahme der zu tradierenden Werte und Ideale werden wir keine Prozesse zur Identifikationsfindung anstoßen können." Walter Müller, "Tradition und Traditionspflege" (11 December 2013). Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.vtnvagt.de/index.php/traditionslinien/209-tradition-und-traditionspflege.
[213] Verband zur Pflege der Traditionen der Nationalen Volksarmee und der Grenztruppen der DDR e.V., "Satzung vom 26. 01. 2013", § 3.1.
[214] Ibid, § 2.4. http://www.vtnvagt.de/index.php/der-verband
[215] Müller, "Tradition und Traditionspflege".
[216] Verband zur Pflege der Traditionen der Nationalen Volksarmee und der Grenztruppen der DDR e.V., "Satzung vom 26. 01. 2013", § 2.4.
[217] "Aufruf Soldaten für den Frieden: Die forcierte Militarisierung Osteuropas ist kein Spiel mit dem Feuer – es ist ein Spiel mit dem Krieg!" Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.vtnvagt.de/index.php/vorstandsinformationen/248-soldaten-fuer-den-frieden

German citizens and point to the ostensible "discrimination" of former members of GDR armed forces.[218] Both seem to have no more than a few hundred members.

Of a more local type in the cluster of associations cherishing the heritage of particular GDR institutions is the *Arbeitskreis Geschichte der Jugendhochschule "Wilhelm Pieck"*, which seeks to preserve the legacy of the institute of higher education that was directly tied to the GDR's official youth organization, the FDJ, and which was situated at the Bogensee in Wandlitz. The focus is on the school buildings' status as protected heritage. The *Arbeitskreis* calls upon former teachers and students to share their memories as well as artifacts from this period.[219] Referring to the school's function as an "educational institution for members of partner organizations from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe", the *Arbeitskreis Geschichte* seeks to preserve its "lived commitment to peace, international understanding and solidarity" and its "antifascist traditions", with the goal to "contribute to the debate against contemporary right-wing extremism and the right-wing *Zeitgeist*."[220] Although this organization is primarily interested in preserving memories of the past, it again translates the GDR's program into a political guideline for the present, and calls upon members and sympathizers to remain faithful to its political ideals.

Another OKV association belonging to this history/memory cluster is the *Freundeskreis der Sport-Senioren* (Friends' Circle of Sport-Seniors; FSS). It stands out because it fills the niche of sports, and also because it is the OKV affiliate that is most clearly focused on social bonding. The group was established in 1990 by former GDR sports functionaries. Like the clubs mentioned above, this circle is built around "common experiences and common points of view"; but as FSS chair Erhard Richter mentioned in an interview with me, "the most important [thing] is contact, solidarity and humaneness".[221] By 2012, the FSS still had around 130 members; another estimated 80 former members had passed away since the FSS was founded. Contrary to other organizations, the FSS does not seek to become larger:

> We will not become much bigger either [than we are now]. And that also isn't possible, because of our social function. We also must keep contact with all the

[218] Verband zur Pflege der Traditionen der Nationalen Volksarmee und der Grenztruppen der DDR e.V., "Satzung vom 26. 01. 2013", §3.3.
[219] http://www.ak-geschichte-der-jugendhochschule-wilhelm-pieck.de/geschichte-der-jhs/treffen-aus-anlass-des-70-jahrestages/ (accessed 2 November 2016).
[220] Ibid.
[221] "Das wichtigste ist Kontakt, Solidarität und Menschlichkeit." Interview with Erhard Richter, 7 November 2012.

> members. For instance, we call them on birthdays, and on "round" birthdays we visit them with flowers. And we visit people who are ill.[222]

The FSS organizes an annual (social) gathering, and two times per year, the FSS organizes a walking trip for its members, with a common meal afterwards. "That is also such a piece of community building".[223] "For a while, we also organized bowling tournaments. But we stopped that when participation became too low." The FSS also organizes events related to their past activities, usually tours or lectures around GDR sports personalities, and an annual commemoration celebration for Werner Seehlenbinder, a German wrestler and communist killed by the Nazis in 1944. And the organization actively calls upon (the children of) former sportsmen and their trainers to donate artefacts and photos to GDR-themed museums in Germany, like the OKV-related *DDR Kabinett Bochum*. Most members live in Berlin, and separate smaller groups of "sport-seniors" have formed in Leipzig, Rostock, and Schwerin.

The FSS became a member of the OKV in 1998, and in that year a work group on sports (AG Sport) was founded at the GRH, obviously with overlapping membership: Richter is the chair of both the FSS and the AG Sport, and in this latter capacity, also a board member of the GRH). The AG Sport is much smaller than the FSS, with only 15 members, and was established to pronounce the political aspects of the FSS agenda: it protests the "*Strafrente*" for GDR sportsmen, and speaks out against the condemnation of GDR state doping programs, the existence of which was reported by the media in 1991. Since 2002, there is a German national aid fund for GDR athletes who fell victim to these doping schemes. This condemnation of GDR doping use is heavily resented by the former sports functionaries represented in the OKV: they feel that the condemnation of GDR doping programs is an injustice to their former careers. They do not deny the existence of doping in the GDR, but they criticize the hypocrisy of disregarding that such practices were also widespread in the FRG, as part of the Cold War competition.[224] International sport events gave the GDR an opportunity to win international recognition, especially before the FRG recognized the GDR as a separate state; thus the GDR population should be thankful to its sportsmen. This narrative is obviously important mainly to people who feel attached to the GDR; the overlap with other OKV goals is obvious.

[222] Interview with Erhard Richter, 7 November 2012.
[223] "Das ist eben auch so ein Stück Gemeinschaft." Interview with Erhard Richter, 7 November 2012.
[224] Hans Bauer (GRH) and Erhard Richter (FSS), "Erklärung der GRH und des Freundeskreises der Sportsenioren zur Doping-Doppelmoral" (15 August 2013). Accessed 2 November 2016: http://okv-ev.de/Dokumente/GRH/GRH_Sport_Doping_Doppelmoral.pdf.

Besides former athletes and sports trainers, similar traditional groups that were established in the GRH include the work groups of former Border troops (*AG Grenze*) and Stasi members (*AG Aufklärer, AG Sicherheit*). The AG Grenze again has a sub-group *Grenze International*, which maintains contacts with similar groups in neighboring countries Poland and the Czech Republic, as well as a group concerned with "Border troops' inheritances and archive"[225] that was set up in 2008 to collect and "authentically represent" the heritage of the GDR's border troops.[226] The *AG Aufklärer* meanwhile publicizes information on the MfS under the name *Kundschafter der DDR*.[227] Meanwhile, another group of former Stasi members that were active as spies abroad (that is, in West Germany and elsewhere) united in the mid-1990s to form the "Initiative Group Spies for Peace Demand Justice". This last group is not a part of the GRH, but maintains warm connections with this, and other, OKV organizations.[228]

Finally, there are groups that preserve the memory of certain GDR leisure institutions. One example is the "Association of Allotment Gardeners, Settlers and Plot Users" (*Verband der Kleingärtner, Siedler und Grundstücksnutzer*, VKSG), founded in July 1995 to represent members who keep allotment gardens, or small plots of land not tied to their homes. Such dachas have been popular also in the West, but they were particularly important to city inhabitants of socialist countries, including for the function of raising vegetables. There are still large dacha parks in East Germany that are completely "inhabited" by people who obtained their plots before 1989. Like allotment gardens elsewhere, the atmosphere in these parks is more familiar than in residential areas – and the slow turnover of "settlers" allows for a feeling of continuity. When meeting him at his dacha in East Berlin in 2013, previous GRH president and then- OKV president Siegfried Mechler praised this place as somehow still more connected to the GDR than its fast-changing big-city surroundings. The VKSG represents the interests of its members who own such allotment gardens, especially when it comes to rental prices and the protection of the tenants' rights towards the city administration. Interest representation here is tied to a specific form of leisure cherished by OKV members for its sociability and its connection to the GDR.

[225] "Interessengemeinschaft Grenzernachlässe und Archiv". Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.igra-gt.de/index.php/arbeitsgrundlagen

[226] Heinz Schubert, "Fünf Jahre IGRA unter dem Dach der GRH". In: GRH, *Sonderdruck der Arbeitsgruppe Grenze: Herbsttreffen 2013* (Berlin: GRH 2013), pp. 16-17; here 16.

[227] http://www.kundschafter-ddr.de/?page_id=16 (accessed 2 November 2016).

[228] *Initiativgruppe Kundschafter des Friedens fordern Recht*; conversation with Dieter Feuerstein, 8 November 2012; http://www.kundschafter-frieden.de/ (accessed 2 November 2016).

Cluster 6: Linkage: equality /social justice and the welfare state

Until the late 1990s, the GBM set up contacts to other organizations beyond the OKV mainly through the human rights agenda. Yet from 1998, the GBM increasingly engaged in social networks and coalitions. These include short-term alliances with action groups, as in a "Coalition Against Social Demolition" (*Bündnis gegen Sozialkahlschlag*; 1999),[229] but also cooperation in organizing mass demonstrations, as was the case in 2004 when the GBM participated in the large Trade Union [DGB] protests against the "Agenda 2010".[230] But the GBM also maintained some long-term coalitions with other organizations. This happened mainly on the initiative of GBM local chapters (*Ortsverbände*), which were increasingly integrated in local networks of solidarity and social protest.[231] Currently, the GBM is active in three larger networks of this kind; the "Alliance for Social Justice and Human Dignity" (BüSGM), the "Social Work Group of Treptow-Köpenick" (SAT-K), and the "Alliance for Social Justice Berlin-Lichtenberg/Hohenschönhausen" (BüSGLH). These local networks still closely resemble the original networks of "Eastern organizations" established around the PDS in many places in the early 1990s. Interestingly, they have been rather successful in forging links between different left organizations, and especially the SAT-K also gained wider public recognition. Notably, these are local social coalitions in east Berlin that protest the social policies of post-*Wende* German governments. While ties with *Die Linke* decreased over time, the "transmission belt organizations" described by Patton thus still function at a local level, now in "social coalitions". These broad alliances allow the GBM to claim a wider group of sympathizers.

The GBM strategy of establishing local coalitions with like-minded activists from outside of the OKV can indeed yield public recognition that OKV would otherwise not obtain. This can be illustrated with the *Sozialer Arbeitskreis Treptow-Köpenick,* which was established in 1990 on the initiative of Dr. Erhard Reddig (1929-2015). It came out of two earlier organizations established shortly after the *Wende* by people close to the former regime.[232] Closely connected to the GBM (of which Reddig was a member), the *Sozialer Arbeitskreis Treptow-Köpenick* functions as a loose cooperation platform for different leftist

[229] "Chronik der GBM e.V.: Das Jahr 1999".
[230] "Chronik der GBM e.V.: Das Jahr 2004".
[231] "Chronik der GBM e.V.: Das Jahr 1998". Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.gbmev.de/chrnk/GBM_Chronik_1998.htm.
[232] The *Sozialer Arbeitskreis Treptow*, and the *Bürgerkomitee Plänterwald*, which Reddig had founded in 1990.

organizations, including ISOR and the GRH, but also some senior citizens' groups within the trade union *ver.di* and *Die Linke*, and the social- and welfare organization *Volkssolidarität*.[233]

The *Sozialer Arbeitskreis Treptow-Köpenick* does not seem to be limited to a specific theme: it published declarations on items as different as the East-West pensions gap in Germany, the Soviet commemoration site in Treptow-Köpenick, right-wing extremism, and many other topics. The city council awarded Erhard Reddig with the "Berlin Badge of Honour for outstanding social engagement"[234] for his voluntary work, and thereby acknowledged that the SAT-K was instrumental in bringing several existing initiatives in the neighbourhood together. According to the Berlin city website,

> with personal modesty, [Reddig] puts forward his arguments and criticism in an informed and factual manner. In such cases, he often pursues concerns which otherwise would have escaped the attention of the City Council. Dr. Reddig enjoys respect and recognition across different political groups. It is time to pay special tribute to this exemplary civic engagement in the area of democracy development.[235]

Upon his death, the district office Treptow-Köpenick issued an obituary in which Reddig was praised for his engagement in local politics.[236] Erhard Reddig also was from the start an active member of the *Bündnis für Demokratie und Toleranz gegen Fremdenfeindlichkeit und Rassismus in Treptow-Köpenick,* which was founded in response to the establishment of an NPD-office in the neighbourhood, and which includes many different local civic organizations.[237]

A comparable linkage platform is the "Alliance for Social Justice Berlin-Lichtenberg / Hohenschönhausen" (*Bündnis für soziale Gerechtigkeit Berlin- Lichtenberg/ Hohenschönhausen*, BüSGLH), founded on 13 May 2004. Its stated goals, the fight "against the breakdown of social welfare and for social justice", makes it fall into cluster 1, but the major purpose is linkage among "social organizations and associations, trade unions and other social interest groups." The BüSGLH is heavily dominated by OKV organizations (GBM;

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[233] Harald Nestler, "Zu Erfahrungen und Ergebnisse in der Zusammenarbeit mit Vereinen, Bündnissen und der PDL sowie kommunalen Initiativen/Politikern im Territorium" (23. June 2009). Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.okv-ev.de/Dokumente/Reportdokumente/Beitraege%2023.06.09/Beitrag_Harald%20Nestler_23.6.09.pdf

[234] *Berliner Ehrennadel für besonderes soziales Engagement*.

[235] "Verleihung der Ehrennadel an Herrn Dr. Erhard Reddig" (7 July 2008). Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.berlin.de/ba-treptow-koepenick/derbezirk/ehrennadel.html.

[236] Bezirksamt Treptow-Köpenick, "Dr. Erhard Reddig - Ein Leben für Gerechtigkeit, Demokratie und Toleranz 1929 – 2015. Pressemitteilung vom 24.04.2015". Accessed 2 November 2016: https://www.berlin.de/ba-treptow-koepenick/aktuelles/pressemitteilungen/2015/pressemitteilung.301701.php.

[237] Information on the *Bündnis* and its activities can be found on its website. Accessed 2 November 2016: http://demokratie-tk.de/pages/de/start.php.

ISOR; GRH; and, formerly, the VVN-BdA), yet it also includes local branches of some other organizations active in Berlin Hohenschönhausen, such as the *Bund der Ruhestandsbeamten, Rentner und Hinterbliebenen im Deutschen Beamtenbund* (a lobby organization for state servants in retirement), *Deutscher Bundeswehr-Verband* (an interest organization of German military personnel, also open to NVA veterans), the East German welfare organization *Volkssolidarität*, the trade unions *Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* and *Vereinigte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft* [ver.di], as well as two local pensioners' organizations, *AG Seniorenpolitik Hohenschönhausen* and *Jahresringe Hohenschönhausen*. That the association is more than an OKV vehicle is reflected in its board (*Sprecherrat*), which also includes local representatives of the *Bundeswehr-Verband* (Karlheinz Fietz), *Volkssolidarität* (Ingrid Menzel), and ver.di (Gerd Buddin), next to OKV activists.[238] As the area of Hohenschönhausen is known for its concentration of former Stasi personnel, we can assume that the local non-OKV board members are not alien to the OKV agenda either. Among the OKV issues the BüSGLH emphasizes in particular the pension question, which as we have seen is presented as a common "Eastern" issue, and the protest against "political prosecution".

A similar alliance from another Berlin neighbourhood is the "Union for Social Justice and Human Dignity" (*Bündnis für soziale Gerechtigkeit und Menschenwürde*, BüSGM), which was founded on 13 July 2005 in Berlin Tempelhof-Schöneberg, that is, in the western part of the city. The BüSGM is mainly concerned with issues of job security, as well as with protests against the Hartz IV social welfare system in Germany. Like the GBM, the BüSGM understands the current situation as resulting from violations of economic, cultural and human rights. In order to address these issues, it seeks to cooperate with like-minded organizations – most notably those within the OKV.[239] The BüSGM claims to provide political education, especially in the areas of social theory, philosophy, economics, and culture. Social justice should be reached through the mobilization of "progressive elements" (*fortschrittliche Kräfte*), and through advancing democracy in the FRG.[240] Some BüSGM activities seem to be direct copies from the GBM repertoire, as for instance the annual BüSGM "Award for

[238] Lothar Haugk (ISOR), Günter Schneemann (GBM) and Kurt Stankewitz (GRH), "Gegen massiven Sozialabbau – für soziale Gerechtigkeit. Erklärung zum 'Bündnis für soziale Gerechtigkeit' Berlin-Lichtenberg/Hohenschönhausen. " (April 2005). Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.okv-ev.de/Dokumente/Mitglieder_html/Erklaerung%20BueSG_B_LH_internet.pdf .

[239] Bündnis für Soziale Gerechtigkeit und Menschenwürde e.V. i.Gr., "BüSGM hat sich als gemeinnütziger Verein gegründet" (21 June 2006). Online at: www.okv-ev.de.

[240] Bündnis für Soziale Gerechtigkeit und Menschenwürde e.V, "Satzung" (2nd, changed version, 16 Janury 2007).

Solidarity and Human Dignity" (which in 2016 honoured the Jewish Auschwitz survivor and anti-racism activist Esther Bejarano).[241]

To sum up, local initiatives link up with OKV/GRH/GBM because they benefit from their experience, numerical weight, and perhaps from their social networks; and to OKV these small and local organizations are important because they convey the image of a "networked" organization, with strong ties to other groups and to local bottom-up initiatives. In particular, such networked social work from the grassroots level provides legitimacy through active political engagement, especially as some of OKV's bigger organizations (like ISOR) are approaching the end of their conventional path. At second glance, however, one cannot ignore that these popular local associations (including SAT-K) in fact come from the same GDR-establishment background as the OKV does, which reduces the scope of OKV's success in outreach and linkage. SAT-K succeeded in establishing a continued and well-respected presence in communal politics with the help of *Die Linke* in Berlin city politics, which acts as an OKV supporter in some cases. Yet the success of the SAT-K in reaching qualitative linkage has proven very hard to emulate: both the BüSGLH and the BüSGM are somehow successful in projecting the *image* of a wider audience, but only SAT-K was not from the start an "OKV project".

Even with *Die Linke*, the OKV organizations have mixed relations despite their earlier congruence. While PDS politicians certainly supported the emergence of OKV, today most of the OKV members I interviewed are elusive when asked about the existence of such ties, and many have critical positions towards *Die Linke*. Although all agree that they have a lot in common with the "party base" of *Die Linke*, several of them are genuinely disappointed in the party: they assert that its top has lacked any interest in (open) contacts with the OKV. In fact, *Die Linke* has made great effort to distance itself from the image of representing former GDR personnel, and the party is quick to sue people for libel when assertions are being made about links of prominent party members to the former MfS. As a result, few scholars claim connections between the OKV and the PDS as openly as Patton does. Fact is that over time, *Die Linke* has consciously tried to distance itself from its SED heritage, and specifically from the Stasi, in order to become accepted as a mainstream political party in the whole of Germany.[242] The OKV thus provides a place for identification with the SED of old, while at

[241] Junge Welt, "Menschenrechtspreis für Auschwitzüberlebende Esther Bejarano" (15 June 2016). Accessed 2 November 2016: http://www.presseportal.de/pm/82938/3353222.
[242] For more on this, see chapter five.

the same time being safely placed outside of the party – so as not to burden the new PDS/*Linke* with a doubtful heritage.

Conclusion: The afterlife of the GDR?

The picture that emerges is that of the OKV as a conglomerate of organizations which represent East German citizens who remain loyal to the GDR's ideology and view on history. As Patton rightly observed, most of these associations emerged from the broader environment of the SED/PDS/Linke. Patton regards their activities as a success story, and argues that the presence of these grassroots organizations was one of the reasons for the resurrection of the PDS in East Germany.[243]

Yet here I believe some nuance is in order. First, from the impressive 25.000 members that OKV boasted in the early 1990s, some 23.000 were mainly involved in big organizations such as ISOR and GRH that exclusively pursue the interests of old Party and state elites, and not broader "Eastern" interests.[244] Persons who once worked for the Ministry of State Security became members of ISOR to protest the reduction of their Stasi pensions. But beyond these tangible financial interests, the OKV conglomerate is largely made up and kept alive by a variety of smaller associations. These smaller organizations developed various focus points that complement each other to make up a multifaceted OKV "whole" with much overlap not only in terms of ideology/world view and activities but also in membership. Yet the outreach to other groups that do not have the same membership of former GDR officers and people invested in GDR culture has been very limited.

The most successful OKV organizations in terms of outreach are those that present themselves as grassroots initiatives on a local level, and that are active in social work and issues connected to unemployment. Yet the local character of these initiatives also limits their outreach beyond Berlin.

Links to existing non-OKV organizations with a stronger membership base that could have given OKV interests more leverage beyond the core of former officers and functionaries were established not through grassroots links but only on the top level, through personal connections of a few leading activists. This strategy is dubious, especially if a non-OKV organization is listed as a partner organization on OKV websites but does not make this

[243] Patton, *Out of the East*, p. 88.
[244] Interview with Siegfried Mechler and Rudolf Denner, 8 November 2012.

relation clear to its own members, as seems to have been the case with the VVN-BdA -- which eventually left the OKV umbrella.

When reviewing Patton's argument that the OKV-type associations were established with the aim to support the PDS/*Linke* in its attempts to maintain a strong foothold in "eastern" society, and to keep citizens from leaving the party, and perhaps even to gain new voters and members, then we must conclude that this policy has had only limited success. In particular, a distinction needs to be made between legal and social citizen support groups and groups formed to protect the interests of GDR elites. To be sure, groups that informed former GDR citizens about rights and procedures in the FRG might definitely have had the function to strengthen the Party, but these have not been central to the OKV.

Instead, already shortly after its establishment the OKV turned into an environment for identification with the GDR, rather than for engagement with post-GDR politics through the PDS/*Linke*. This is also clearly visible in the development of OKV-related organizations. As discussed above, the GBM as OKV's cradle was set up by activists who were first active in the larger *Arbeitslosenverband*, which at that time was an association with a broad "eastern" identity yet without the ideological component of defending the GDR as a political project. The GBM then split from its mother organization precisely to focus more exclusively on the milieu of old GDR cadres. Instead of being outward-looking, the dominant perspective within the GBM and its affiliated organizations has since been one of deploring the end of the GDR, and the loss of the public recognition that the former status groups once enjoyed. The GBM then expanded, and it attracted and swallowed local associations that had sprung up independently. Simultaneously, the GBM also produced many new offshoots which specialized in certain parts of the overall agenda of rehabilitating the socialist past, and of organizing the pursuit of specific goals in the present. The result is a broad network of organizations that, under the umbrella of the OKV (and partly of the GBM as its second highest level of agglomeration), produce a mosaic of interrelated action or memory groups, with overlapping focus areas, and with overlapping personnel.

That most OKV members are above all concentrated in the organizations with financial and pension-related agendas does not mean, however, that the smaller organizations are not important to them, or just a fig leave. To the contrary, for the core membership base of OKV precisely the small associations with specific goals and agendas are of particular importance, even if some of them have only a dozen active members. First, these smaller organizations enable the OKV to project itself as a large and broad association, by virtue of

the number not of members but of affiliated groups. There has been an active strategy to multiply affiliates: work groups that were initially active within the GBM or GRH have set up autonomous associations that then joined the OKV; and vice versa, once an independent organization becomes member of the OKV, the bigger OKV organizations (like GRH, GBM) set up own work groups that double the profile of the new member organization, often with a more pronounced focus on the political side of the given spectrum (as we saw with the example of the *Sportsenioren* and its smaller GBM counterpart). In result, some groups have a "double" presence, as a work group in one of the larger OKV organizations and as an independent member organization. Accordingly, membership is largely overlapping. By projecting a large, and seemingly varied, membership base, OKV seeks to convey to the outside world – but also to their own members – the image of a strong political force, with views that are shared by a large portion of the East German population.

While the hard material interests are pursued by the bigger associations, admittedly with considerable energy and (as we will see in chapter four with the example of ISOR) a high level of professionalism, the smaller clubs tend to focus on the "soft" issues of the GDR image (e.g. monuments and historiography) and culture and leisure (e.g. exhibitions of GDR art; guided trips). These activities are important in keeping the OKV community together; they provide the social glue. With concrete agendas around specific monuments, groups, and issues, they do a lot to preserve the GDR legitimacy narrative of antifascism and equality that is so important to the OKV members as a whole, and that also undergirds the legal and material claims of ISOR and GRH. Moreover, independent groups that joined the OKV as late as 2015 did so primarily because of their identification with the cultural and historical-political identity of the organization.[245] This again attests to the function of the OKV as an epistemic community: the pluriformity of associations allows the mutual validation of each other's understandings and activities, in an impressive feedback loop. Within the complex structure of OKV, each of its clusters and segments contributes to the activists' efforts to hold on to their image of the GDR and, in their words, "to stand by their biographies".[246] This backward-looking character prevents OKV from reaching out significantly beyond the core group of "affected", but it does not prevent it from flexibly adapting to the new legal and political environment of post-unification Germany.

[245] The current political identity of the OKV is a bit more elusive - as discussed in chapter five, OKV members generally see themselves as socialists and sympathize with either *Die Linke* or smaller radical left parties in Germany.
[246] e.g. Interview with Helmut Holfert, 10 July 2012.

PART III:

THE MAINTENANCE OF COMMUNAL CONTINUITY

IN ACTIVISM AND OUTREACH

Chapter 4:

Activism: ISOR as OKV's Major Lobby Organization

The present chapter focusses on legal activism, as conducted by the largest organization within OKV, the *Initiativgemeinschaft zum Schutz der sozialen Rechte ehemaliger Angehöriger bewaffneter Organe und der Zollverwaltung der DDR* (ISOR; "Joint Initiative for the Protection of the Social Rights of Former Members of Armed Bodies and the Customs Administration of the GDR"). According to its own accounts ISOR had a membership of no less than 25,000 in the early 1990s, and still musters 20,000 members today.[1] Although these figures most likely represent a gross overestimation of the actual number of members, ISOR remains the largest OKV organization by far. Founded in June 1991 with the aim of achieving the full restoration of the original pension rights of former GDR secret service and military personnel, ISOR drew from the 91,015 official Stasi co-workers at the time the Berlin Wall fell,[2] not to mention former Stasi personnel already retired by 1990.[3] ISOR is thus the OKV organization that most clearly represents Stasi interests. Its current director, Wolfgang Schmidt (b. 1939), was the head of the group for Evaluation and Information of Department XX of the MfS; this section was responsible for surveillance of the state apparatus, culture, church, and underground. Schmidt is also responsible for the website of the "Insider Committee for the Promotion of Critical Appropriation of the History of the MfS" (*Insiderkomitee zur Förderung der kritischen Aneignung der Geschichte des MfS*, usually referred to as *Insiderkomitee*), where he regularly writes controversial blog posts; in relation to such publishing activities he has been charged with libel several times.[4]

From the start, ISOR decided to focus on filing constitutional complaints against regulations that truncated the pensions of former GDR elites. Its members have been using formal and juridical venues to advocate what they perceive as their legal rights, avoiding more direct political forms of interest representation. They also conduct massive letter-

[1] http://www.isor-sozialverein.de.
[2] Jens Gieseke, *Die hauptamtlichen Mitarbeiter des Ministeriums fur Staatssicherheit: MfSHandbuch.* (Berlin: BStU 1996), p. 44. Accessed 19 February 2014: http://www.nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0292-97839421302572.
[3] With changing pension regulations, many of these employees lost a substantial part of their previously expected pension income. It should be noted that from the start the membership base of ISOR consisted primarily of elderly people who had a long career in the Stasi and who, therefore, derived the largest part of their pensions from their time with the secret service. After the dismantling of the GDR's secret service, elderly officials were also less likely to build up new careers in the unified Germany compared to their younger colleagues.
[4] The *Insiderkomitee* website can be found at http://www.mfs-insider.de/.

sending campaigns to national, regional, and local politicians of different political parties, as well as mass petitions to specific political institutions, such as the German parliament's committee for petitions, the ministries that deal with the issue of pensions, the German chancellor (*Bundeskanzler*), as well as leaders of parties that might possibly influence the opinion of the government or (part of) the parliament on the pension issue. This raises the question of why these particular strategies have been chosen. How do these strategies relate to the stated goals of the individual organization, the historical (self-) understanding of its members, and the historical experiences and mind-set of the organization's activists?

The issue of Stasi pensions

In order to understand ISOR's strategies and actions we first need to look at the development of German legislation on GDR pension claims. In the Treaty on the Establishment of German Unity of 31 August 1990, the governments of the two German states agreed to unify pension law by transferring GDR pension claims to the FRG statutory pension system, "whereby unjustified benefits [were] to be abolished and excessive benefits [were] to be reduced, [so that] a better position (*Besserstellung*) [of certain GDR groups] compared to similar claims and entitlements from other public sector pension schemes should not take place." Benefits would also be reduced or abolished "when the entitled person violated the principles of humanity or rule of law or had in a grave manner used his position for personal gain or to the detriment of others."[5]

As a result, former Stasi officers saw their pensions decrease drastically, reflecting the new political system. This was achieved with the Pension Transfer Act (*Rentenüberleitungsgesetz*, RÜG), which was approved after unification by the new enlarged Bundestag parliament on July 25, 1991. With the RÜG, parliament kept the basic pattern of GDR social security intact but annulled special provisions. Article 3 of the RÜG, the Law on the Transfer of Claims and Entitlements for Additional and Special Retirement Schemes of the GDR (*Gesetz zur Überführung der Ansprüche und Anwartschaften aus Zusatz- und Sonderversorgungssystemen der DDR*, AAÜG),[6] reduced the pensions of employees in a range of professions that were considered "close to the regime" (*staatsnah*) and also affected

[5] "Vertrag zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik über die Herstellung der Einheit Deutschlands [Einigungsvertrag]" [Treaty on the Establishment of German Unity] (31 August 1990). BGBl. II at 889. Anlage II Kap VIII H III, 9b 1–2.

[6] See paragraph 6 of the AAÜG, in which the special provisions of several groups close to the regime are annulled.

many groups other than former Stasi personnel (including cultural and scientific elites as well as directors of GDR state companies). However, over time most other groups were removed from the list of targeted professions (as will be discussed below), leaving Stasi personnel as the main target of this law.

Such pension reductions were meant to prevent a situation in which former GDR elites would continue to benefit from their previous service to the discredited SED regime through (relatively) high pensions stemming from their high salaries in the GDR. This rationale had already been agreed upon in treaties between the FRG and the GDR before unification[7], and in fact the pension scheme of the Stasi was already abolished through a law adopted by the last and freely elected GDR parliament (*Volkskammer*) in 1990. According to this *Volkskammer* law, Stasi pension claims would be transferred to the (GDR's) statutory pension scheme under special provisions with the "goal of adjusting [the pensions] to the [corresponding] level in the civil sector."[8] These measures were then justified by Eberhard Stief, State Secretary in the GDR's Ministry of Internal Affairs, by pointing to the physical and psychological torture of citizens conducted by the Stasi. According to Stief, all former employees of the Stasi were guilty of such crimes, independent of whether individual officers were directly involved.[9] This was a widely-shared sentiment in the last *Volkskammer* and later also in the united Bundestag, where representatives of several parties repeatedly stressed that in the newly unified Germany former oppressors should in no way be better off than their victims. The initial reductions of Stasi pensions were thus motivated both by a more practical desire to level pensions in different sectors (also through the RÜG[10]), and by a desire to create a just financial balance under the new political order (through the AAÜG). A range of GDR (higher) functionaries saw their pensions reduced to the average GDR pension level or, in the case of former Stasi personnel, even below that.

[7] Including the State Treaty on Monetary, Economic, and Social Union (May 18, 1990) and the Treaty on the Establishment of German Unity (August 31, 1990).
[8] "Gesetz über die Aufhebung der Versorgungsordnung des ehemaligen Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit/Amtes für Nationale Sicherheit [StasiAufhG]" [Law on Cancellation of Pensions] (29 June 1990), GBl. I at 501, no. 38.
[9] Detlef Merten, *Probleme gruppengerechter Versorgungsüberleitung: § 7 AAÜG im Lichte des Grundgesetzes* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot 2012), p. 25.
[10] The ensuing Law to Amend the Pension Transfer Act (Gesetz zur Änderung des Rentenüberleitungsgesetzes) of December 18, 1991, abolished the GDR pension calculation system based on individual contributions and replaced it with a system based on individual pension earning points (*Entgeltpunkte*, EGPs). EGPs were calculated by converting GDR incomes and voluntary pension insurance payments into corresponding FRG earnings and subsequently into corresponding pension points, with an annual contribution limit of 1.8 EGP. The inclusion of voluntary and additional pension schemes within this contribution limit also meant that high pensions from the GDR would in all cases be truncated at 1.8 times the nominal (yearly calculated) contribution of the statutory pension scheme. In addition, several GDR pension provisions for specific professions were not covered under the new pension scheme, leading to so-called conversion gaps (*überführungslücken*). This includes GDR pension claims of such diverse groups as nurses, ballet dancers, miners, and informal caretakers.

ISOR's resistance to the pension laws

Several initiatives emerged to oppose the new pension legislation. One of these organizations was ISOR, which initially grew out of a protest instigated by PDS representative Astrid Karger (b. 1957)[11] against the abolition of state-provided health insurance for persons previously insured through special pension schemes.[12] As the main interest organization of former Stasi employees, ISOR right from the start began to lodge constitutional complaints against these pension reductions. And although many of its members rejected the new pension law (RÜG) in its entirety, and on reasons of principle,[13] ISOR argued that a fundamental rejection of the transition had no chance of success. Instead, ISOR only objected to the specific law that reduced its members' pensions (the AAÜG), which it claimed to be "political" in nature. This objection was based on the principle of "value neutrality" (*Wertneutralität*) of welfare facilities, including pensions. Although few Germans were likely to sympathize with ideological arguments for higher Stasi pensions, it was assumed that there would be an interest (at least within the judiciary) in protecting the rule of law, and that the courts could be convinced of ISOR's interpretation. By choosing this pragmatic strategy, ISOR's argumentation came to be completely grounded in FRG law.

At a press conference in January 1992, then chair of ISOR Astrid Karger announced:

> We support…the complaints to the Constitutional Court to the effect that general punishment through social law be rejected as unconstitutional and as contrary to the rule of law, and we [demand] a fundamental change of the RÜG by the government. We do not want any privileges. We [just] demand that our insurance benefits are not valued as less than those of all other beneficiaries.[14]

[11] Astrid Karger was PDS representative in the district of Berlin-Lichtenberg. Her husband had been an MfS officer. Due to the concentration of Stasi headquarters and offices in Lichtenberg, many (former) Stasi employees lived (and continue to live) there.

[12] ISOR (ed.), *Wertneutralitat des Rentenrechts: Strafrente in Deutschland?* (Berlin: Kai Homilius 2005), p. 54

[13] Initially, some ISOR members advocated a principled struggle against the entire new pension law and favored fighting the general decision to change the GDR system of social security (*Systementscheidung*), whereas others argued for a more "pragmatic" approach, in which only those measures especially disadvantageous to ISOR's members would be fought against. Axel Azzola, a jurist at the Technical University of Darmstadt who in 1989–1990 acted as advisor to the GDR's Round Table (*Runder Tisch*) and who after unification became a prominent critic of GDR pension reductions, convinced a majority of ISOR members to focus on "political discrimination and pension reductions that exist within the federal German pension scheme." Wolfgang Konschel, *Der lange Weg zur Rentengerechtigkeit: Zur Geschichte der Überleitung der ostdeutschen Rentenansprüche in das bundesdeutsche Rentensystem – Enteignungen und Ungerechtigkeiten bei in der DDR rechtmässig erworbenen Rentenansprüchen* (Schkeuditz: GNN Verlag 2012), pp. 99–100. He did so against the opinion of East German legal specialists Karl-Heinz Christoph and Ingeborg Christoph, who continue to represent many pension complainants in court by claiming the continued validity of GDR pension assurances (Wolfgang Schmidt, interview, 28 November 2013). Christoph and Christoph host a website on their work related to former GDR pensions at http://www.ostrentner.de.

[14] ISOR (ed.), *Wertneutralitat des Rentenrechts*, p. 68.

During the same event, Karger also denied allegations that ISOR was an "organization of former MfS members…who found each other in order to demand unjustified high pensions for themselves and to disrupt social peace".[15] On the contrary, Karger claimed that ISOR had a moderating impact on its members. In her words:

> ISOR was established…to help those affected (*Betroffenen*) to cope with their extraordinarily difficult social problems [caused by the new legislation] and to avert unjustified discrimination and generalizing condemnations that are brought up to substantiate unwarranted reductions of justified [pension] claims. Our activity should help to secure a climate, after unification and based on the constitution, that does not push people into social isolation and, on the basis of their acquired knowledge and skills [in their capacity as Stasi officers], into *a potential source of danger* for the free and democratic order.[16]

The above quote is exemplary for the ambiguities in ISOR's self-presentation, especially in those early days. Obviously, ISOR was established as exactly an interest organization of former GDR functionaries, which Karger here denies. At the same time, and already at this early point, these interests were indeed defended through the avenues available within the constitution. This law-abiding attitude was even confirmed by Eckart Werthebach, president of the German intelligence service (*Verfassungsschutz*), who in June 1991 judged that ISOR was at that point "no concentration against the basic democratic order".[17]

Against this background it is remarkable that Karger referred to her following as a "potential source of danger for the state," thus implicitly confirming the public image of the Stasi as a shady and dangerous organization whose members were trained in violent and subversive activities. Throughout the subsequent years ISOR would keep pointing out that the existing pension legislation "endangers social peace" and "blocks the integration" of GDR and FRG.

Writers of statements, letters, and petitions who mention this specific problem must demonstrate that they have the support of significant parts of society. This is one of the reasons why ISOR's juridical activities are usually supported by protest actions addressed to the authorities or to certain public personalities, in which as many members as possible are encouraged to send letters or preprinted postcards signaling their agreement with ISOR's requests or demands (see below). Yet in its public statements ISOR quickly stopped implying

[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., p. 69 (emphasis added).
[17] "Raubzug auf die Rente: Ehemalige DDR-Soldaten und Stasi-Mitarbeiter organisieren sich - zum 'Schutz ihrer sozialen Rechte'". In: *Der Spiegel* (29 July 1991). Accessed 19 February 2014: http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-13490350.html.

that former Stasi or GDR National Army (Nationale Volksarmee, NVA) officers might at one point engage in unconstitutional subversive action, and ISOR activists deliberately refrained from open agitation in order not to reduce their chances of juridical success.

It was, however, not obvious that their complaints would reach the Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe. In order to be accepted for scrutiny at this court of last resort, complaints have to meet strict criteria pertaining to their general validity. It must furthermore be proven that the issue could not be resolved by lower-level courts. Direct complaints to the highest court, which were indeed lodged by ISOR sympathizers, were, therefore, quickly rejected.[18] Instead of appealing directly to Karlsruhe, members of ISOR were instructed to file individual objections against decisions taken on the basis of the RÜG to lower-level social courts, from where the issue would ultimately reach the Constitutional Court. In the main office of ISOR in Berlin, as well as through local ISOR groups, a Working Group on Law (*Arbeitsgruppe Recht*) helps members with their pension issues; and ISOR's website provides instructions for the formulation of appeals against pension insurance decisions, as well as models for writing petitions (under "Hilfen").[19]

According to ISOR, by September 1992 its members had already filed around 1,400 complaints with lower courts.[20] In the first decade after the introduction of the RÜG law, ISOR members reportedly initiated around 23,000 lawsuits on the issue of special pension schemes; an additional 3,000 lawsuits addressed supplementary pension schemes.[21] ISOR employed several lawyers to produce juridical reports in support of their cause.

Limited success

In addition to this juridical strategy, especially in the early 1990s ISOR frequently staged letter-writing campaigns to the German parliament and to individual politicians or officials in order to lobby for the interests of its members.[22] One tangible result of these campaigns was that in January 1995, representatives of ISOR and other interest organizations

[18] ISOR (ed.), *Wertneutralitat des Rentenrechts*, p. 69.
[19] http://www.isor-sozialverein.de/cms/index.php?id=115 (accessed 31 October 2016).
[20] ISOR (ed.), *Wertneutralitat des Rentenrechts*, p. 71.
[21] Konschel, *Der lange Weg zur Rentengerechtigkeit*, p.100, mentions these numbers for the law firm of Benno Bleiberg & Mark Schippert alone. ISOR speaks of "over 21,000 complaint and appeal procedures" that had been initiated by "7,500 ISOR members and about 1,600 GBM members" by early 1996. ISOR (ed.), *Wertneutralitat des Rentenrechts*, p. 105.
[22] According to a press release of SPD parliamentarian Rudolf Dressler from June 1995, until that time 2,300 petitions for a change of the RÜG had reached the German parliament. Printed in ISOR (ed.), *Wertneutralitat des Rentenrechts*, p. 209.

met for a "consultation" with then Secretary of State for Labour and Social Affairs Bernhard Worms (of the Christian Democratic Union Party [CDU]). On March 10, 1995, and again on 1 February 1996, Worms invited ISOR activists to discuss the new draft legislation in person.[23] ISOR meetings with politicians of opposition parties PDS and initially also SPD took place on a more regular basis. Typically, ISOR's letters to politicians were accompanied by individual letters by numerous members composed along similar lines, but adding their personal backgrounds and cases. In addition, postcards with pre-printed messages were distributed in order to be signed and sent to specific politicians.

The effects of such letter campaigns are difficult to assess. On the one hand, the number of protest letters opposing existing pension regulations was repeatedly referred to in parliamentary debates by representatives in favor of changing the legislation.[24] On the other hand, it seems that politicians unsympathetic towards ISOR's cause were little influenced by such letters, regardless of their numbers and content. In their replies they pointed to the relative marginality of former Stasi members as a group and argued that the pension reduction was legitimate. In response to a 1996 letter-writer who argued that a refusal to change the law would lead to continued instability in the territories of the former GDR because this would force him (as well as others) to "pass on a negative attitude towards the order of the FRG onto the generation of his grandchildren," CDU representative Franz Peter Basten noted that such an implicit threat "does not impress" him.[25]

In the meantime, the RÜG, including the AAÜG, was indeed several times changed by parliament. In 1993, the Pension Transfer Supplement Act (*Rentenüberleitungs-Ergänzungsgesetz*) removed several groups of GDR professionals from the list of pension reductions, and slightly amended the pension reductions of some other groups. Smaller amendments to the law were made in December 1995.[26] Following several proposed amendments to the AAÜG by opposition parties PDS, B90/Grünen, and SPD, as well as by the federal state of Berlin, new legislation in 1996 brought changes specifically to the RÜG's article on pension reductions (*AAÜG-Änderungsgesetz*). This reflects the wider dissatisfaction with the first versions of the law. Indeed, groups other than ISOR had also protested and lobbied through political and juridical avenues. Significantly, however, there

[23] Ibid., pp. 91, 94, 105.
[24] Deutscher Bundestag: *Plenarprotokoll* 13/108. Accessed 2 November 2016: http://dipbt.bundestag.de/dip21/btp/ 13/ 13108.asc.
[25] ISOR (ed.), *Wertneutralitat des Rentenrechts*, p. 223.
[26] Artikel 7, "Änderung des Anspruchs- und Anwartschaftsüberführungsgesetzes (826-30-2)" [Article 7,"Change of the Law on the Transfer of Claims and Entitlements (826-30-2)"], 1995, BGBl 1 at 1835.

was never a majority in parliament willing to change regulations pertaining to former Stasi members, and, in fact, the *Bundestag* never changed the AAÜG in favor of former Stasi employees of its own accord, that is, without an order from Karlsruhe.[27] Importantly, the other professional groups who did manage to see their pension reduction removed had argued that their work was of a *different* nature than that of the MfS and the NVA.[28]

ISOR's strategy was successful insofar as their petitions indeed helped trigger a number of Constitutional Court rulings that demanded AAÜG reforms. In response to several individual complaints referred by lower courts as well as to some direct constitutional complaints,[29] the Constitutional Court ruled on 28 April 1999,[30] that the indicators used for identifying groups that had received "excessive benefits" (and thus became subject to pension reductions) were inadequate and that "closeness to the state" (being "*staatsnah*") was in itself no automatic proof of such excessive benefits. This ruling forced the *Bundestag* to revise and explicate the indicators used. Yet in a second ruling of the same date the Constitutional Court justified the reduction of all MfS pensions on the grounds that former Stasi remunerations had been disproportionate.[31] However, the Constitutional Court also ruled that no pensions may be reduced below the East German average, arguing that excessive reduction would drive people into poverty. As a result, the Bundestag also had to increase the pensions of former Stasi members. ISOR and associated organizations consider this a success of their making and point out that without their legal action the original pension reduction might still be in place.[32] Yet paradoxically ISOR also openly dismisses that very ruling, because the decision that pensions should be raised was based on social arguments rather than grounds of principle.[33] In fact, the ruling did not challenge the legitimacy of reducing pensions of former

[27] Likewise, the SPD and B'90/Grünen government of 1998–2005 did not abolish the pension reductions for Stasi officials.
[28] Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte, *Handbuch zur deutschen Einheit, 1949–1989–1999*. Updated edition (Frankfurt am Main: Campus-Verlag 1999), pp. 129–130; Hubertus Knabe, *Die Täter sind unter uns: Über das Schönreden der SED-Diktatur* (Berlin: Propylaen 2007), p. 187.
[29] The Constitutional Court rulings were issued in response to complaints lodged at the Federal Social Court by an erstwhile professor of Humboldt University, a former lieutenant of the National Police (*Volkspolizei*), and two former Stasi officers, at the Social Court Gotha by a former civil judge at a GDR regional court, and directly at the Constitutional Court by a senior physician and a Stasi colonel.
[30] Bundesverfassungsgericht, "Leitsätze zum Urteil des Ersten Senats vom 28. April 1999 1BvL 22/95; 1BvL 34/95" (28 April 1999). Accessed 23 January 2017: https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de /SharedDocs/Entscheidungen/DE/1999/04/ls19990428_1bvl002295.html.
[31] Bundesverfassungsgericht, "Leitsätze zum Urteil des Ersten Senats vom 28. April 1999 1BvL 11/94; 1BvL 33/95; 1BvR 1560/97" (28 April 1999). Accessed 23 January 2017: https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de /SharedDocs/Entscheidungen/DE/1999/04/ls19990428_1bvl001194.html.
[32] Interview with Wolfgang Schmidt, 12 June 2012.
[33] ISOR (ed.), *Wertneutralitat des Rentenrechts*, pp. 130–131.

Stasi personnel and top politicians as such. For this reason, some activists regard the 1999 rulings as a defeat.[34]

The complaint culture of ISOR is therefore not just about money; rather, the organization uses its juridical strategies to also demand a change in the dominant image of the GDR. Inga Markovits, a specialist on the history of GDR law from the University of Texas at Austin, describes the link between the law and historical memory as follows:

> Law routinely hands out verdicts of guilt and innocence. It defines our prototypes of model citizens and our opposites…. In doing so, law has developed rules on how to investigate the past: for instance, by assigning burdens of proof, or by devising criteria to distinguish reliable from unreliable evidence…. It is both an important source and an interpreter of history.[35]

From this point of view, it is easy to understand why ISOR is unhappy with Constitutional Court rulings on Stasi pensions so far. The feeling of injustice remains a central part of ISOR's and the OKV's narratives of repression in unified Germany. In particular, pension cuts are directly compared to the Nazis' denial of pension rights in the Eastern territories they had subjugated in World War II.[36] Such ideas resonate with ISOR activists who still cherish the antifascist foundation myth of the GDR, which justified the establishment of the GDR as a truly antifascist alternative to the continuation of fascist (personnel) structures in the capitalist FRG.[37]

In this context ISOR members also indignantly refer to the fact that after World War II, pensions of West Germans who had been active in the Nazi state and military apparatus were quickly restored. In the early years of the FRG, the reorganization of the social security system after the defeat of the Third Reich was largely centred on pension reforms.[38] After the retreat of the Allied Powers, even those who had committed serious offenses in the name of the Nazi regime were largely exempted from imposed legal penalties and progressively regained their social rights. The administration in charge of carrying out these reforms largely consisted of old members of the fascist bureaucracy— whose "expertise could not be

[34] Interview with Wolfgang Schmidt, 8 August 2013.
[35] Inga Markovits, "Selective Memory: How the Law Affects What We Remember and Forget about the Past: The Case of East Germany". In: Law & Society Review 35(3) (2001): pp.513–563; here 514.
[36] ISOR, "Bericht des Vorstandes an die ordentliche Vertreterversammlung von ISOR e.V. am 12.11.2005". (2005). Accessed 19 February 2014: http://www.isor-sozialverein.de/Reden%20&%20Aufs%E4tze/HParton_171105.htm; Konschel, *Der lange Weg zur Rentengerechtigkeit*, p. 101.
[37] E.g., interviews with Eberhard Schulz (9 July 2012); Helmut Holfert (10 July 2012); Siegfried Mechler, (12 July 2012); Gertrud Fischer et al. (12 July 2012).
[38] Hans Günter Hockerts, *Sozialpolitische Entscheidungen im Nachkriegsdeutschland: Alliierte und deutsche Sozialversicherungspolitik 1945 bis 1957* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 1980).

missed".[39] According to Norbert Frei,[40] there was a general feeling that the Nazi past, as well as its repercussions, should be resolutely left behind (*Schlussstrich-Mentalität*) and that the German population had suffered enough from the war and defeat. The HIAG (*Hilfsgemeinschaft auf Gegenseitigkeit der Angehörigen der ehemaligen Waffen-SS*, "Mutual Help Community of Members of the Former Waffen-SS")[41] styled its members as "victims of denazification" and demanded back their status and "honour," of which they had, in their eyes, been wrongfully deprived.[42] Yet they hardly had to go to court over this: there was broad popular and political support for former Nazi perpetrators at least until the mid-1950s.

The HIAG maintained contacts with all the democratic parties in the *Bundestag*, including the CDU and the SPD,[43] and up until 1955, when the Social Democrats publicly repented of their lenient position, there was political unanimity about the need to restore the full rights of former Nazi soldiers and bureaucrats (except for the political leaders).[44] The major obstacle for a full rehabilitation of Nazi officials' pensions in those years was not the parliament but rather the Constitutional Court – which maintained that the end of the Third Reich also entailed the end of its civil servant regulations.[45] Thus, whereas the situation after 1945 was one of popular and political, but not legal, support for former perpetrators, after 1989 the situation was fundamentally different. This is greatly resented by ISOR members, who maintain that there was (and is, through continuing social rights of those former Nazis still alive) more support for former fascists than for antifascists.

The idea that Stasi pension reductions stem from a tradition of anticommunism in the FRG is thus strongly present in ISOR's understanding of affairs. This again feeds resentment against the political motivation of such pension reductions, which are understood by ISOR as targeting people based on their former capacity as pillars of socialist *ideology* rather than on their former *activities* and previous income *inequalities*. In fact, because it is impossible to untie the connection between the GDR's state ideology and its undemocratic political order, such claims are hard to deny completely (and at the same time, OKV activists cannot deny that the GDR was undemocratic; as indicated above, they legitimate the former state on

[39] Hockerts, *Sozialpolitische Entscheidungen im Nachkriegsdeutschland*, pp. 107–108.
[40] Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik: Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* (Munich: C. H. Beck 2012), p. 19.
[41] Originally the HIAG referred to "members of the former Waffen-SS"; later the name was more often rendered "former members of the Waffen-SS" – probably because this sounds more natural.
[42] Karsten Wilke, *Die "Hilfsgemeinschaft auf Gegenseitigkeit" (HIAG) 1950–1990: Veteranen der Waffen-SS in der Bundesrepublik* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh 2011), p. 15.
[43] Wilke, *Die "Hilfsgemeinschaft auf Gegenseitigkeit"*, p. 109-112.
[44] Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik*, pp. 130–131.
[45] Ibid., pp. 93–94.

different, historical, grounds). Yet pension reductions clearly no longer target all (former) socialist elites. Changes made to the AAÜG[46] in response to the Constitutional Court's rulings of 1999 as well as to subsequent and largely similar rulings of June 2004[47] exempted almost all groups from the pension reductions with the exception of those who had worked directly for the Stasi (§ 7 AAÜG) or in positions of authority over the Stasi ("*weisungsbefugt*"; § 6 Abs. 2 AAÜG). In accordance with Constitutional Court rulings, the *Bundestag* did increase the pensions of these two groups to the average GDR pension, but it did not consider the option of increasing their pensions further, which was explicitly left open by the Constitutional Court. Even the SPD, which had in the past been more sympathetic to ISOR's cause, now maintained that it was best to leave the pensions at the ordained "average" level, in order not to stir up debates again (as indicated in a letter dated 3 July 2000, from Jörg Deml [SPD, Working Group on Work and Social Affairs] to an ISOR member[48]).

Running out of options

Although court complaints have so far not led to the full restoration of pensions for ISOR's core membership of former Stasi employees,[49] ISOR remains convinced that filing legal complaints is the best strategy to eventually obtain full pensions for their members. In fact, the Constitutional Court rulings of 1999 and 2004 led to a new flood of complaints. ISOR now argues that it is unfair to continue a truncation of their pensions based on their alleged "excessiveness," while obviously many others who also received higher than average pensions were relieved of reductions.

[46] These changes include the Second Law Amending and Supplementing the Claims and Entitlements Transfer Law (*Zweites Gesetz zur Änderung und Ergänzung des Anspruchs- und Anwartschaftsüberführungsgesetzes*) of July 27, 2001, (retroactively valid from May 1, 1999) and the First Act to Amend the Claims and Entitlements Transfer Law (*Erstes Gesetz zur Änderung des Anspruchs- und Anwartschaftsüberführungsgesetzes*) of February 2, 2005, (retroactively valid from July 1, 2007); other changes were of little consequence for those still affected by the AAÜG.

[47] Bundesverfassungsgericht, "In dem Verfahren über die Verfassungsbeschwerde des Herrn S...: 1 BvR 1070/02" (22 June 2004). Accessed 23 January 2017: https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Entscheidungen/DE/2004/06/rk20040622_1bvr107002.html; Bundesverfassungsgericht, "Leitsatz zum Beschluss des Ersten Senats vom 23. Juni 2004: 1 BvL 3/98; 1 BvL 9/02; 1 BvL 2/03" (23 June 2004). Accessed 23 January 2017: https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Entscheidungen/DE/2004/06/ls20040623_1bvl000398.html.

[48] Printed in ISOR (ed.), *Wertneutralitat des Rentenrechts*, pp. 240–241.

[49] Many of the military personnel left ISOR after their full pensions had been reinstated (interview with Wolfgang Schmidt, 12 June 2012).

Former Stasi members resent their pension truncations even more now that other groups have been excluded from this measure. Thus ISOR board member Helmut Holfert, who became an ISOR member already in the early 1990s, recalled how he became more active in the organization after the exemption of almost all groups previously targeted by §6:

> Because we [at the *Stasi*] did not devise the tasks that we fulfilled ourselves. These tasks were set for us by the Party and the government. And those were the subject of paragraph 6. And if that [paragraph] is lifted or changed, then the same should go for paragraph 7. One cannot separate horse and rider.[50]

Indignant about the way in which the Stasi was now singled out as the sole target of pension reductions, and convinced that this was done for ideological reasons, Holfert started writing to politicians on personal title, urging them to set this right:

> But I only got evasive answers. Including for instance... this came from *Frau* [Erika] Lotz, at the time, from the SPD.[51] [Who wrote to me] "well, you speak of pension reductions as a form of criminal law [*Rentenstrafrecht*]... Something like that doesn't exist. There is no such thing in our legislation. An acquired pension, even of a thief or murderer, cannot be arbitrarily cut because he has stolen or murdered. Rather, that which he acquired through work, he is also entitled to as a pension." And then I wrote back, "thank you, *Frau* Lotz, now at least I know who I am. On which side I am... I am classified beyond thieves and murderers."[52]

According to ISOR, the continued pension truncation of Stasi officers is in direct opposition to three principles guaranteed by Germany's constitution: (1) the principle of equality (because they argue that there is little difference between the MfS and the *Nationale Volksarmee*, whose former employees are no longer targeted by the AAÜG); (2) the principle of proportionality (because now, the higher the former salary, the higher the reduction, and pensions below the GDR average are not reduced at all); and (3) the principle of *Wertneutralität*, or value neutrality (as explained above).[53] In current publications, ISOR focuses on the first two points; these are the more pragmatic arguments to urge the Constitutional Court to once more consider their complaints against the Stasi pension cuts.

[50] Interview with Helmut Holfert, 10 July 2012.
[51] Erika Lotz was an SPD member of the *Bundestag* from 1994 to 2005. From October 2002, she acted as the SPD's vice-speaker on health and social security; from January 2004 she became the main speaker on this issue, until she left parliament in September 2005.
[52] Interview with Helmut Holfert, 10 July 2012.
[53] See the latest juridical report (*Gutachten*) produced for ISOR by Detlef Merten, *Probleme gruppengerechter Versorgungsüberleitung.*

Yet obviously the point of value neutrality remains the most important to ISOR itself. After all, ISOR is still fighting an ideological battle of principle, albeit with pragmatic weapons.

Yet the latest complaints of ISOR and its adherents have again been rejected repeatedly. On July 6, 2010, the Constitutional Court dealt with a complaint of (vice-) ministers of the GDR and decreed that it is indeed allowed to treat former co-workers of the MfS (§ 7 AAÜG) and their political superiors (§ 6 Abs. 2 Nr. 4 AAÜG) as one group, because they generally obtained benefits that were "not connected to their performance, and [that were] politically motivated" and "therefore excessive."[54] ISOR has responded to these setbacks by gathering more information on the Stasi's income structure, in the hope that such information, once complete, will force the Constitutional Court to revisit their complaint.[55] For this, ISOR consulted documents in the documentation center of the Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former GDR (*Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*; BStU), which was established in 1990 to deal with the paper legacy of the GDR's former secret service and which has been directed by several prominent GDR human rights activists (including, from 1990 to 2000, by current German President Joachim Gauck, after whom the BStU became known as *Gauck Behörde*).

Not surprisingly, the process of ISOR's data gathering was also marked by friction: when at one point ISOR was denied access to certain information it instructed its members to support a protest campaign addressed towards then BStU director Marianne Birthler.[56] In 2012, ISOR once again went to the Supreme Social Court (*Oberstes Bundessozialgericht*, BSG), armed with a new juridical report. Although in the spring of 2013 this complaint was again not accepted for review, ISOR has remained undeterred. In the summer of 2013, ISOR's current managing director Wolfgang Schmidt maintained in an interview with me that they would continue fighting until the AAÜG is finally abolished; their complaint at the

[54] Bundesverfassungsgericht, "Leitsatz zum Beschluss des Ersten Senats vom 6. Juli 2010, 1 BvL 9/06; 1 BvL 2/08 Zur Überführung der Ansprüche und Anwartschaften aus Zusatz- und Sonderversorgungssystemen des Beitrittsgebiets" (6 July 6 2010). Accessed 23 Janury 2017: http://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Entscheidungen/DE/2010/07/ls20100706_1bvl000906.html.

[55] ISOR has worked for a long time on such reports. In 1999, the Constitutional Court declined a report on the income structure of the MfS by legal experts Manfred Kaufmann and Erich Napierkowski on the grounds that the information it presented was incomplete. In response, ISOR tried to complete its data by continued research in the archives of the Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former GDR (BStU). See ISOR [ed.], *Wertneutralitat des Rentenrechts*, pp.150–151).

[56] ISOR, "Der Vorstand teilt mit". In: *ISOR Aktuell* 11 (2005), p. 2. Accessed 27 August 2014: www.isorsozialverein.de/aktuell/ia_2005/ia_1105_S.1-3.pdf.

BSG should only be seen as another "hurdle" on their way to Karlsruhe.[57] It seems, however, unlikely that the Constitutional Court will agree that new evidence presented by ISOR is sufficient ground for a new appeal. And after these last attempts, possibilities for juridical complaints within Germany seem to be exhausted.

This prompted ISOR and some related groups to also use international avenues to strengthen their demands. Attempts to start a model procedure (*Musterverfahren*) at the European Court for Human Rights were, however, unsuccessful.[58] Still, on 20 May 2011, the UN Economic and Social Council's Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in its "Concluding Observations on the State" report submitted to the German government, noted that "[t]he Committee is concerned about the discrimination in the enjoyment of social security rights between Eastern and Western Landers [sic], as reflected in the Federal Constitutional Court decision of July 2010 on the pension rights of former GDR ministers and deputy ministers."[59] The report is often cited in OKV publications as an example of how "the world" agrees that the ongoing pension reductions are unfair. Yet the UN report bears little consequences for the German state, and did not lead to any changes of the existing law.

This leaves ISOR in a situation of decreasing options for continuing their struggle, and it seems that many activists understand that their cause is basically "lost." At the same time ISOR will continue its efforts against the AAÜG. On the one hand, it does so because its members genuinely feel their rights are being violated. But equally important is, it seems, that ISOR's very existence, as a common platform and support network for its members, has become largely dependent on the continuation of the legal complaints, which are commonly understood as ISOR's raison d'être.[60] We should, therefore, also look at ISOR's social functions.

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[57] Earlier, Schmidt still seems to have hoped that the matter could be settled at the BSG; yet also at this stage he was already suggesting that a new ruling of the Constitutional Court was the main goal of ISOR (Interview with Wolfgang Schmidt, 12 June 2012).

[58] The process was supported by ISOR and other OKV organizations, including the GRH. See also the call for solidarity and donations to cover the process costs, issued by GRH chair Hans Bauer and Hans Modrow, the last socialist leader of the GDR. Hans Modrow and Hans Bauer. "Aufruf zur solidarischen Unterstützung des Verfahrens beim EUGH für Menschenrechte gegen das diskriminierende Rentenstrafrecht". (12 September 2011). Accessed 19 February 2014: http://www.grh-ev.org/assets/applets/Rentengerechtigkeit_2004.pdf.

[59] United Nations Economic and Social Council. "Concluding Observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Germany" (20 May 2011) . E/C.12/DEU/CO/5.

[60] See ISOR's website (http://www.isor-sozialverein.de/) under "Was will ISOR?" According to ISOR's statutes, the organization's goal is primarily to offer help with problems stemming from its members' former occupations, more broadly defined (http://www.isor-sozialverein.de/, "Satzung"). Yet Schmidt in 2012 still hoped that ISOR's latest complaint at the Supreme Social Court would be accepted, in which case "ISOR can be abolished" (interview, 12 June 2012).

ISOR as *Sozialverein*

Like other OKV organizations, ISOR was from the beginning conceived of not least as a social association (*Sozialverein*). Established at a time of widespread resentment against the recently toppled GDR elites, and especially against the MfS as the organization that upheld their undemocratic power, ISOR understood itself as a mutual support platform for former functionaries that now faced open hatred. Reflecting on the psychological difficulties that many former Stasi members faced in coping with the radical new situation after 1989/90, Wolfgang Schmidt said it was

> therefore important that this [ISOR] is also a form of life aid, if you want... So that the individual notices that he is not alone and the only one who is struggling with things, and that others see things similarly. So this is a form of solidarity with each other which also grew out of our... out of the entire life situation.[61]

To this end, ISOR organized itself locally in "Territorial Initiative Groups" (*Territoriale Initiativgruppen*, TIGs), a term that evokes military connotations ("territorial defence"). These groups usually formed around a core group of old friends and comrades, and membership then spread through word of mouth:

> For instance, when I think of my own situation... someone heard that I was involved in this organization. And then, within four weeks, I had ninety people at my door [laughs]: "I heard that I can sign up [for ISOR] here"... And this included people I had never seen before. They simply got my address from someone, you know, and it spread like a snowball. So this developed and expanded very quickly, and then of course it took on organizational form through all these territorial groups which we had in all neighborhoods of Berlin and... we have, had, 180 of such groups. And then of course, those who found each other first also attempted to bring acquaintances, others affected [by the pension cuts]... to get them to join [the group], and this is how [ISOR] grew.[62]

These TIGs form the primary structure through which ISOR's members maintain social bonds, and they organize meetings and events for their members. The TIGs thus form

[61] Interview with Wolfgang Schmidt, 12 June 2012.

[62] Ibid. In 2007, the Berlin branch of Germany's intelligence agency estimated that there were 188 local initiative groups. This was however likely an overestimation. Moreover, given ISOR's decreasing membership figures, the number of TIGs is likely to have declined since then. Berliner Verfassungsschutz. "Berichte im Ausschuss fur Verfassungsschutz (VSA) des Abgeordnetenhauses von Berlin, behandelt in öffentlicher und nicht-öffentlicher Sitzung am 14. Marz 2007 und am 18. April 2007, über 1. 'Gesellschaft zum Schutz von Burgerrecht und Menschenwurde e.V.' (GBM) 2. 'Gesellschaft zur rechtlichen und humanitaren Unterstutzung' (GRH) 3. 'Insiderkomitee zur Forderung der kritischen Aneignung der Geschichte des MfS'(Insiderkomitee) 4. Initiativgemeinschaft zum Schutz der sozialen Rechte ehemaliger Angehoriger bewaffneter Organe und der Zollverwaltung der DDR' (ISOR e.V.)". (Berlin 2007), p. 32. Accessed 19 February 2014: http://www.berlin.de/imperia/md/content/seninn/verfassungsschutz/bericht_strukturen_ex_mfs.pdf?start&ts=1216297037&file=bericht_strukturen_ex_mfs.pdf.

members' personal and social connection to ISOR, whereas more general decisions about the course of action for defending their pension rights are taken by ISOR's central board, which resides in Berlin. The board is elected at a delegate meeting by representatives from all TIGs for a period of four years.[63]

On ISOR's website, little information can be found on its local groups; only the TIG of Neubrandenburg seems to host its own website.[64] Other groups regularly contribute announcements to ISOR's monthly paper (*ISOR Aktuell*) but have no independent internet presence. Yet on its website ISOR suggests it helps its members not only with pension issues but also with more practical aid—which should be organized through the local ISOR groups: "In the TIGs, ISOR supports its members through a locally differing [and] diverse community life as well as by encouraging and organizing help, especially for the support of the aged and the infirm."[65] This is done in order to "promote [its members'] sense of belonging together (*Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl*) through shared experiences and close social bonds."[66] The importance of this social aspect was also stressed by Wolfgang Schmidt:

> *Also*, all these [representatives of different armed] organs, who found each other [in ISOR], and who at least partly already knew each other well in GDR-times, and had a good cooperation, yes... Well, this is of course the case [that they kept together]. And, independent of that, on the level of former [armed] service units (*Diensteinheiten*), people regularly come together, quarterly, every half year, yearly, there are meetings, but purely... of a friendly nature. Like class reunions, or colleague reunions! Yes, of course this basis [of a shared past] is also there. [...] Of course, memories always play a role, but *ach*, sometimes it is really just about the sociable [aspect] (*gesellige*), being together, [talking about] family problems, exchange, [inquiring about each other's] state of health. [laughs]. That is always an important issue, yes. Who has fallen ill, who is healthy again...well (*na ja*).[67]

Next to the consulting work offered by the central Working Group on Law, ISOR branches organize events and invite speakers about issues related to the GDR, in addition to museum visits and other trips. That the organization also has a social function, and is understood by at least some of its members as a community, can also be seen from its website, which has a special section with "offers, advertisements, notices, and information from our organization members."[68] This section is used by members who offer, for example,

[63] http://www.isor-sozialverein.de/, "Satzung".
[64] http://www.isor-nb.de.
[65] http://www.isor-sozialverein.de/, "Wie hilft ISOR?"
[66] http://www.isor-sozialverein.de/, "Was will ISOR?"
[67] Interview with Wolfgang Schmidt, 12 June 2012.
[68] http://www.isor-sozialverein.de/, "Von Mitglied zu Mitglied".

their holiday homes in popular East German vacation spots for relatively low prices to their comrades.

All of this closely evokes the structures of the GBM and the GRH that have been discussed in chapter 3, and which also combine political protests and advocacy work with numerous work groups that focus on cultural and historical issues and the maintenance of traditions and social ties. The social function of ISOR also seems to be growing in importance because of the increasing age of its members.

Shifting to political strategies?

The latest failure before the Supreme Social Court, as well as the loss of members due to old age and death, have in recent years spurred ISOR to look for a change of course. At the delegate meeting on 21–22 October 2013, it was decided to try to win new and younger members for ISOR and to become politically more active.[69] This can be understood at least partly as a reaction to losing any hope of juridical success. There have always been members who advocated a more political course, and some of ISOR's principal activists, including Wolfgang Schmidt, have also been very vocal and confrontational in debates about the GDR past.[70] Yet before the October 2013 convention, the strategy was always to keep confrontational politics outside of ISOR's direct activities.

However, there were also a few occasions on which ISOR members took to the streets. One of these instances happened on 14 March 2006, in response to a public meeting at the Stasi prison memorial of Berlin Hohenschönhausen. One of the official speakers was Berlin's Culture Senator Robert Flierl of the *Linkspartei*.PDS.[71] Among the 300 people who attended the meeting were around 100 former Stasi employees (mostly elderly men) who, according to witnesses, formed a bloc and vehemently protested against the current historiography on the MfS. They angrily shouted and cursed speakers who talked about the Stasi prison at Hohenschönhausen, and they demanded to be allowed to tell the "real" story of the prison.[72]

[69] ISOR, "Entschliesung der Vertreterversammlung der ISOR e. V. vom 21. und 22. Oktober 2013". In: *ISOR Aktuell* 11 (2013), p. 3. Accessed 27 August 2014: www.isor-sozialverein.de/aktuell/2013/ia_1113.pdf.
[70] Including through his activities for the *Insiderkomitee*; see also p. 158 above.
[71] The PDS was briefly named *Linkspartei*.PDS in the period running up to the merger with the WASG (*Arbeit und soziale Gerechtigkeit – Die Wahlalternative*, Labor and Social Justice – The Electoral Alternative) (2005–2007). After the merger was completed, the Party continued as *Die Linke*.
[72] An account of the evening from the perspective of former dissidents can be found in a letter of Reinhard Dobrinski on behalf of the *FORUM zur Aufklärung und Erneuerung e. V.* (an organization of former GDR civil rights activists concerned with creating awareness about the GDR past) to Berlin's Mayor Klaus Wowereit (see

Obviously, this made many of the former prisoners taking part in the meeting extremely uncomfortable; they experienced this coordinated appearance as a renewed psychological attack on their persons.[73] Unsurprisingly, the former Stasi members look back at the events very differently; they saw their effort to "speak up" against "false claims about the Stasi" as a public success. In their opinion, the Stasi has been continuously smeared with false allegations of extreme repression. Their activity at the Hohenschönhausen memorial was thus an attempt to collectively stand up against what they see as an "unfair" tainting of the Stasi's (and thereby their personal) past. ISOR's managing director Schmidt noted with satisfaction that it was still possible to mobilize a large group of former Stasi members—especially in the Hohenschönhausen district of Berlin, where many buildings of the MfS were located, and where many of its former officers continue to reside.[74]

It is clear that many members of ISOR participated in this event; yet nevertheless, ISOR was not specifically identified by the authorities and by the press as one of the main protagonists. While the leftist Senator Flierl tried to play down the incident during and after the event,[75] the Berlin CDU achieved that Berlin's security agency (*Berliner Verfassungsschutz*, BVfS) produced a report on four OKV organizations; namely the GRH, GBM, ISOR, and the *Insiderkomitee*. Yet this report described ISOR as a mere interest group mainly focused on material goals, and held that ISOR approved such ideological provocations but, in contrast to other OKV groups, did not take part in their organization.[76] The restrained tone of this report resulted from a regional law of 2000, which removed the monitoring of "continued structures and activities" of former GDR intelligence services from the competencies of the Berlin security agency.[77] As a consequence, authorities in the federal

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Reinhard Dobrinski, "Bürgergespräch am 14.3.2006 wurde zum Zirkel tschekistischer Geschichtsfälschung". (14 March 2006). Retrieved 19 February 2014: http://www.ddrdiktatur.de/Texte/aktuelles40mfs-hsh.htm.

[73] In the letter of Dobrinski (2006), the activities are described as fitting the traditional Stasi method of "psychological decomposition" of opponents (*psychologische Zersetzung*).

[74] Interview with Wolfgang Schmidt, 8 August 2013.

[75] Stefan Schulz, "Verfassungsschutz: Ex-Stasi-Offiziere bleiben unbehelligt". In: *Die Welt* (13 March 2007). Accessed 19 February 2014: http://www.welt.de/regionales/berlin/article760112/Ex-Stasi-Offiziere-bleiben-unbehelligt.html.

[76] Already before, former Stasi employees at several prison memorials adamantly rejected the personal accounts of former prisoners and trivialized Stasi prison conditions. This happened for example at the prison memorial of Bautzen. In 2002 former Stasi officers Reinhard Grimmer, Werner Irmler, Willi Opitz and Wolfgang Schwanitz (eds.) launched their book *Die Sicherheit* (2002), in which they present their view on the history of the Stasi. A few people in the audience who attested to Stasi atrocities were scorned and called liars—demonstrating, according to former civil rights activists, the growing impudence of former Stasi members. Siegfried Reiprich, "Stasi in der Offensive: Der 14. März 2006 in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen". In: *Gerbergasse* 18(41) (2006). Accessed 29 August 2014:
http://www.magtec.de/downloads/CAT_183/Stasi_in_der_Offensive__Bericht_zum_14032006_v3.pdf.

[77] The new Law on the Reform of the Security Agency of the Federal State of Berlin also abolished the service's independent organization structure and put it under the Berlin Ministry of Internal Affairs.

state of Berlin have no official possibilities to monitor organizations with a concentration of former Stasi members except through publicly available information. The report, written upon the request of the CDU, clearly demonstrates this: it is completely based on open sources, above all on the Internet sites of the respective OKV organizations.[78] To be sure, the *Verfassungsschutz* report notices that several OKV organizations, and especially the GRH and the *Insiderkomitee*, actively engage in "clashes" with representatives of the Hohenschönhausen memorial, especially through "numerous publications…that focus on the memorial and its director Dr. Hubertus Knabe in a defamatory way".[79] Still, the report fails to mention ISOR's role therein or the strength of the personal ties between the different organizations: as discussed in chapter three, both the GRH and ISOR are member organizations of the GBM, and all of them are members of the OKV. The *Insiderkomitee* in turn used to be a workgroup of the GBM and was led by current managing ISOR director Schmidt who still hosts the *Insiderkomitee* website. The OKV umbrella organization, GRH, ISOR and a number of subsidiary organizations furthermore all have offices in the Neues Deutschland Building in Berlin.

At the same time it is apparent that the security agency does not see in these organizations a threat to Germany's state and constitution. The report recognizes that all of these organizations use similar "patterns of argumentation to trivialize [problems] and to glorify" the GDR in general and the MfS in particular. The report clearly disapproves of the positions taken by the OKV organizations, and it also acknowledges that such positions, especially when they are voiced in a confrontational way, are painful to people who suffered from Stasi repression. Yet the *Verfassungsschutz* also notes that none of the organizations seems to be involved in revolutionary and anti-constitutional activities. Rather, these organizations are "collecting basins" of former GDR high functionaries who continue to condone the past because of their personal involvement.[80] This, indeed, seems to be a rather adequate description of these organizations and their members— and the outcome of a conscious decision of these organizations to fight for their interests in a legal framework.

[78] Berliner Verfassungsschutz. "Berichte im Ausschuss fur Verfassungsschutz".
[79] Ibid., p. 21.
[80] Ibid., p. 9.

GDR continuity?

What we can conclude so far is the following: First, ISOR (as well as other OKV organizations) adheres to the new legality of unified Germany. Its activities are legal in character, appealing to the state's system of justice, even if ISOR claims that this system is unjust; its activities are therefore, ironically, aimed at the perfection of the legal system. In short, ISOR activists must have been convinced that they have a chance of success within this system. Second, their central grievances are focused on a small group targeted by a specific law; they do not struggle for broader political goals such as the restoration of state socialism, whose historical bankruptcy they largely acknowledge in private conversation. Third, ISOR seems to regard juridical steps and "conventional" political activities such as contacting politicians and officials as more useful than "contentious" policies such as underground activities or street protests (the latter were often used by the PDS in the 1990s).[81]

The reasons for this are manifold. ISOR's isolated position indeed makes successful political action unlikely. Outside the group of OKV organizations and their sympathizers, few people support ISOR's demands. Of the German parties represented in parliament, only politicians of *Die Linke* still hold regular contacts with ISOR. Occasional attempts of OKV organizations to link up with broader leftist activism, including at demonstrations in April 2004 against the social policies of the SPD-B'90/Grünen government ("Agenda 2010"), seem to have been on the whole rather unsuccessful. Individual ISOR members are also active in Germany's extra-parliamentarian communist parties DKP (*Deutsche Kommunistische Partei*, German Communist Party) and KPD (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, Communist Party of Germany); yet these parties are so small that ISOR's membership base in fact overshadows them.[82] Close association with these parties and other left extremist organizations would, furthermore, undermine ISOR's attempts to be acceptable to Germany's parties in parliament, as well as to the vast majority of Germany's population. At the same time, ISOR's demands are directly linked to specific laws that can be identified and protested in court. In this sense, it seems that ISOR has taken up the opportunity for action that was perhaps most readily available to them. Consequently, the recent decision to focus more on

[81] Here I am referring to the dichotomy between conventional and contentious political acts as it existed in the GDR and other undemocratic regimes. For unified Germany this distinction makes less sense, as most forms of public protests are generally accepted. I believe the terms are still useful in this discussion in order to highlight continuity and change in political practices. See also Danielle Lussier, "Contacting and Complaining: Political Participation and the Failure of Democracy in Russia". In: *Post-Soviet Affairs* 27(3) (2011), pp. 289–325; here 293.

[82] The OKV's relations with these parties will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5 on linkage.

political agitation should also be understood as stemming from the realization that any attempts to become somehow acceptable within mainstream politics have failed. We can thus conclude that there were several reasons for ISOR's choice of strategies; it reflected a realistic assessment of the general political landscape in Germany.

Yet the quickness with which a legal strategy was chosen remains remarkable. It should be noted that this decision was already taken in the spring of 1991 – only one and a half years after the Berlin Wall fell and almost immediately after German unification. Most East German citizens at the time struggled to understand the flood of new rules and regulations that came with the changed social and political order.[83] GDR law, moreover, had been abolished and replaced with FRG law almost overnight. For former Stasi members and GDR elites there were a number of additional problems. With the abolition of the MfS, all of its former officers lost their jobs (as did many other GDR citizens due to the closures and takeovers of former state companies). The Stasi was heavily resented as the symbol of repression in the GDR. Former GDR elites had lost their close contacts to the political leadership. Political decisions were now taken by a parliament that represented the interests of a country much larger than the GDR had been, and which included as its main part the erstwhile FRG that up until recently had been understood by the GDR's officials as the main "enemy" of their state. Finally, the complete reversal of the previous political order resulted from protests by the GDR population against its leadership, which the Stasi, in its capacity of "shield and sword of the [SED] Party," had been unable to prevent or contain. This brings us back to Andreas Glaeser's concept of political epistemics, which he used to explain the failure of the Stasi to deal with dissent and criticism in constructive ways, and which is equally applicable as an analytical concept for understanding the persistence of GDR views and internal logics within the OKV. This persistence we find very clearly in the agenda of ISOR. However, at the same time we also observe that ISOR was very quick to adapt to the legal procedures after unification. This begs additional explanation. Why were activists positively inclined toward – and indeed comfortable with – advocating their rights in courts already early on?

In the GDR's political culture, petitions were an officially sanctioned form of public discourse. The OKV membership largely comprises former GDR officials, most of whom had experience with standard GDR procedures to effect change (petitions, contacting of state and

[83] For an account of the effect of the political changes on private life, see John Borneman, *After the Wall: East Meets West in the New Berlin* (New York: Basic Books 1991).

Party officials). My interviews[84] showed that many OKV activists (most of whom were convinced socialists and often committed members of the SED and the GDR's official youth organization FDJ, *Freie Deutsche Jugend*) had in the GDR been active in neighbourhood committees or as lay persons in social courts; the latter dealt with "lower level" legal procedures concerning issues at the workplace or in the neighbourhood. These committees served as an interface between citizens and the state.[85]

At the same time, former GDR officials lacked experience with contentious political activity, such as street protests, in order to voice complaints. Most OKV activists still describe themselves as socialists, and OKV organizations occasionally have joined protest marches organized by leftist parties like the PDS, but these activities do not focus on the core issues of OKV organizations; rather than organizing protests, OKV members are still, like they were during GDR times, mobilized to join demonstrations—although these are now oppositional in nature. Because of their compromised moral standing in society, organizations explicitly and exclusively advocating the rights of former GDR elites also are unlikely to mobilize broader support.

But can ISOR's choice of strategies be explained by looking at its members' past engagement with the legal system in the GDR? In the remainder of this chapter we will look at legal practices in the GDR and the way in which several OKV activists were engaged with them, in order to assess whether ISOR's strategies can be explained by GDR practices of how to voice complaints and how to settle disputes.

GDR legal practices: petitioning the authorities instead of suing the state

There were no vertical court cases in the GDR: citizens could not sue their administration. What they could do, however, was to contest administrative decisions by "lodging a [formal] administrative appeal with the office that [had] issued the decision".[86] Any verdict on the appeal would always remain within the framework of the GDR administration itself, without any outside (objective) review.

Complaints are regarded as useful to undemocratic authorities for several reasons. They provide feedback from the population and allow the authorities to respond to citizens'

[84] For example, with Gertrud Fischer et al., 12 July 2012; Helmut Holfert, 10 July 2012.
[85] Inga Markovits, "Pursuing One's Rights under Socialism". In: *Stanford Law Review* 38(3) (1986), pp. 689-761.
[86] Markovits, "Pursuing One's Rights under Socialism", p. 698.

demands on an individual level, pre-empting collective action. Petitions thereby reinforce existing legal norms and political passivity. Petitioners appeal to authorities as loyal citizens and as unfair victims of otherwise reasonable policies rather than as critics of these policies.[87] Because of their specific form, complaints thus offer the population a way of airing their grievances without contesting the Party's claim to power. This fits into the broader picture given by Andrew Port, who maintains that expressions of dissatisfaction were widespread in East Germany, and that the authorities' permissive attitude towards grumbling citizens was an important factor for explaining the forty years of relative stability that prevailed in the GDR.[88]

Important are the ways in which demands were formulated. In his 1991 anthropological study of the disruptions in everyday life that East German citizens experienced after German unification, John Borneman notes that under socialist rule citizens had become used to phrasing their claims as pleas to the state and not as demands. Borneman refers to the case of a certain Hildegard, an avid petitioner in the late GDR, and notes how "her petitions express and consummate a bargain. She presented herself more and more as what the state wanted her to be, in order to get from it what she wanted".[89]

Petitioning authorities has a long tradition in Germany. Both the Frankfurt Constitution (1849) and the Weimar Constitution (1919–1933) granted all citizens the right to petition. And even in Nazi Germany this right was never *formally* abolished.[90] Moreover, petitioning authorities had likewise been a tradition in tsarist Russia, from where the activity was carried over into the Soviet era, and the authorities in the Soviet occupation zone of eastern Germany seem to have been actively soliciting petitions from the start. By 1953, a Decree on Petitions entitled GDR citizens to send petitions (*Eingaben*) on any subject to any political or economic institution of their choice, which was then obliged to reply within four weeks.[91] Such complaints were easy to lodge, and they provided direct access to the upper levels of the administration and even to the government. In four decades of SED rule, regulations that

[87] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Supplicants and Citizens: Public Letter-Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s". In: *Slavic Review* 55(1) (1996), pp. 78–105; Golfo Alexopoulos, "Victim Talk: Defense Testimony and Denunciation under Stalin". In: *Law & Social Inquiry* 24(3) (1999), pp. 637–654; Lussier, "Contacting and Complaining" (2011); Laura A. Henry, "Complaint-Making as Political Participation in Contemporary Russia". In: *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 45(3–4) (2012), pp. 1–12.
[88] Andrew Port, *Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007).
[89] Borneman, *After the Wall*, p. 73.
[90] Felix Mühlberg, *Bürger, Bitten und Behörden: Geschichte der Eingabe in der DDR* (Berlin: K. Dietz 2004), p. 30.
[91] Mühlberg, *Bürger, Bitten und Behörden*, p. 58.

guaranteed the right to petition were several times altered and expanded, which shows that the authorities gave this issue high priority.[92] Yet it was always the administration that decided disputes between itself and its citizens, and in their responses the authorities generally gave no legal explanations for their decisions.[93] In the GDR, complaints were therefore an administrative and extra-legal procedure.

By contrast, the largest OKV organizations, ISOR and GRH, today focus on legal procedures to complain. This became possible through the FRG's legal system. Importantly, this adaptation to the new legal system significantly influenced the quality of complaints. Whereas in the GDR, non-legal and internally reviewed complaints encouraged political passivism, complaints filed in unified Germany give citizens agency in relation to the state. [94] Paradoxically, ISOR is a good example of this agency.

At the same time OKV members petition authorities in a style familiar to them from GDR times. They address Bundestag committees, the *Bundeskanzler*, mayors, and senators, as well as political parties on both national and local levels. However, such letters seem to be largely subsidiary to other OKV strategies and are often used to generate documentation for court hearings.[95] In this way, these "letter petitions" lead to a conversation with various state bodies and officials, even if both sides only state their disagreement. Here the GDR experience is most convincing: as Felix Mühlberg noted in his book on the history of petitions in the GDR, citizens understood petition writing as a form of communication with their state.[96] Borneman similarly characterizes petition writing in the GDR as an attempt to engage authorities in a dialogue rather than as a simple demand for goods or services. Again commenting on Hildegard's situation, this time on an occasion when she receives goods she petitioned for, Borneman observes: "Within two weeks [after submitting her petition], two pairs of shoes in the right sizes arrived in the mail. Hildegard was almost disappointed to get the mute package of goods. She preferred responses, through which the somnolescent authorities governing her life assumed voices and entered into dialogue".[97]

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[92] Annett Kästner, *Eingaben im Zivilrecht der DDR: Eine Untersuchung von Eingaben zu mietrechtlichen Ansprüchen aus den Jahren 1986 und 1987* (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag 2006), p. 59.
[93] Kästner, *Eingaben im Zivilrecht der DDR*, p. 208.
[94] Cf. Henry, "Complaint-Making as Political Participation", pp. 2–3. The FRG included the right to petition in its constitution as early as 1949.
[95] Several of such petitions and, in particular, the answers received from authorities have been published by the OKV (e.g., in several white books published by the GBM).
[96] Mühlberg, *Bürger, Bitten und Behörden* , p. 9.
[97] Borneman, *After the Wall*, pp. 74–75.

Mass petitions, moreover, create publicity and thereby influence public opinion. Mühlberg argues that today this function of petitions "is becoming less important. This is mainly due to the fact that the media has established itself as an independent 'fourth power.' The detour via the petition no longer seems necessary".[98] Yet OKV organizations still use petitions for their publicity function, for they publish their petitions and the authorities' replies on their websites and in their books and brochures. While these publications do not reach a huge audience beyond OKV, the mainstream media that do reach the broader public are regarded as unfair, and of limited use to the organization.[99]

Mediation

Another possible GDR influence on the post-*Wende* activities of OKV associations is their experience with neighbourhood committees as well as with the low-level and informal lay tribunals. Such forms of mediation existed both at the (industrial) workplace in the form of conflict commissions (*Konfliktkommissionen*), whose main field of activity was labour law, and at the neighbourhood level as dispute commissions (*Schiedskommissionen*). As Markovits argues, these committees were considered an integral part of the general East German court system, comparable to West German social courts.[100]

Access to such lay tribunals was free, and rules of procedure were purposefully kept simple to encourage audience participation.[101] Yet, rather than focusing on restoring the rights of complainants, these tribunals were meant to re-educate offenders and reach a collective solution to the problems at hand[102]; thus, to educate good socialist citizens. While the function of such institutions was, therefore, to reduce the agency of citizens, most of my interviewees looked back on them quite warmly. In a group conversation with five OKV sympathizers, all admitted to have been members of their respective house collectives or renters' associations and described their association work as providing a kind of social glue for the community.[103] After 1990 they felt that this social coherence was gone. Similarly, despite the obviously partisan and highly personalized nature of the lay tribunals, OKV

[98] Mühlberg, *Bürger, Bitten und Behörden*, p. 41.
[99] The understanding of mainstream media as being hostile was expressed by most of the interviewees, including Siegfried Mechler (12 July 2012), Helmut Holfert (10 July 2012), Rudolf Denner (8 November 2012), Rolf Berthold (7 November 2012), and Gertrud Fischer et al. (12 July 2012).
[100] Markovits, "Pursuing One's Rights under Socialism", pp. 690–692.
[101] Ibid., pp. 692–693.
[102] Ibid., p. 693.
[103] Interview with Gertrud Fischer et al., 12 July 2012.

members recalled these commissions as benevolent instruments for harmonious conflict resolution; and this they contrasted with the situation today, where (or so they suggest) there is no social control and safety network anymore and where minor mishaps easily lead to a "real" court process which then brands the minor offender as a "criminal."[104]

Yet surprisingly, several of my interviewees who had been personally involved in court cases after 1990 acknowledged that the judges were "really independent."[105] Such statements reveal their acceptance of current court procedures and their admittance of the partisan nature of juridical procedures in the GDR. But OKV activists also clearly consider GDR justice on the whole as having been fair and even benevolent.[106] In this respect, Mühlberg notes that without doubt, the state acted in a paternalistic manner, but that its citizens for a long time accepted this form of rule.[107] This definitely goes for OKV activists, who on the whole were law-abiding and even enthusiastic citizens of the GDR.

It is thus clear that many of the OKV activists had experience with court procedures in the GDR—either as lay assessors and collective participants or (in some cases) as official judges. All activists were furthermore used to courts being easily accessible; this might have lowered their barrier to take complaints to court after unification. This also counts for personal disputes; former GDR elites, including PDS-*Die Linke* politicians like Gregor Gysi, are quick to sue for libel anyone who insinuates that they cooperated with the Stasi.[108] Conversely, ISOR's managing director Schmidt has been sued for libel several times by Hubertus Knabe, director of the memorial at the former Stasi investigatory prison Berlin-Hohenschönhausen. In 2007, Schmidt was found guilty of unjustly having called Knabe a

[104] Interview with Helmut Holfert, 10 July 2012; interview with Siegfried Mechler, 12 July 2012.
[105] Interviews with Wolfgang Schmidt (12 June 2012) and Dieter Feuerstein (13 June 2012; 11 July 2012).
[106] In her study of a regional court in the GDR, Markovits (2006) also notes the attempts of judges to settle cases in a low-key manner, before they enter the court. Although this at least partly stems from practical considerations (such as time constraints), she argues that judges also acted out of a general (and at least for some, ideologically driven) concern for the citizens that found themselves before court. However, Markovits also notes that this does not count for so-called political cases, in which "punishments were hard and became harsher with the years". In: Inga Markovits, *Gerechtigkeit in Luritz: Eine ostdeutsche Rechtsgeschichte* (Munich: C. H. Beck 2006), p. 144. The idea that things are better solved outside the court—and the preference for solving problems through allegedly "warm" and "nearby" lay courts over "cold" professional courts—is also very strongly present among OKV activists. It should be noted here, however, that such personalized procedures obviously do not protect people against ruling opinion and the state.
[107] Mühlberg, *Burger, Bitten und Behorden* , p. 27.
[108] See also the introduction.

demagogue (*Volksverhetzer*) and in 2009 for the "false and offensive representation" of a former prisoner.[109]

Contacting politicians

Contacting politicians is generally described as an individualized way of seeking personal redress (or that of a small group). Directed towards the personal rights of the individual complainant(s), such complaints are unlikely to result in widespread public mobilization and are instead a way to look for solutions "within the system".[110] Yet for ISOR, contacting politicians often transforms into lobbying political representatives as their (likely) support base; this is especially the case with regard to *Die Linke*. By influencing politicians, activists directly attempt to affect laws and regulations as they are produced in the political arena. Contacting politicians is, therefore, more overtly political than petitioning authorities.

Contacting is also highly dependent on political connections. Although there are several factors that affect the likeliness of citizens to get involved in contacting, including their socio-economic position and level of education,[111] it appears that the best indicator for this is whether citizens have political ties.[112] In the early 1990s especially, OKV and ISOR leaders had clear ties to SED successor party PDS. Yet at that time the socialist party wielded only limited influence in German politics on a national level. When, over time, the PDS-*Die Linke* acquired importance on the political scene it only managed to do so by publicly criticizing its own SED-past and by openly distancing itself from the OKV and former GDR elites longing for restoration. Not surprisingly, OKV activists responded with disappointment. The nature of relations with *Die Linke* has thus considerably changed over time, and the Party is no longer regarded as an automatic ally, although *Die Linke* politicians are still frequently contacted out of habit, ideological closeness, and past promises of support.

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[109] Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, "Presse—Information: Stasi-Offizier muss Ex-Häftling 2500 Euro zahlen. Berliner Landgericht verhängt erstmals Strafe wegen 'beleidigender Darstellungen' über SED-Opfer". News release (6 June 2009). Accessed 15 November 2014: http://www.stiftung-hsh.de/downloads/CAT_319/2009_06_02_R%C3%B6llig.pdf.

[110] Patrick J. Conge, "The Concept of Political Participation: Toward a Definition". In: *Comparative Politics* 20(2) (1988), pp. 241–249; Lussier, "Contacting and Complaining"; Henry, "Complaint-Making as Political Participation".

[111] Most OKV members obtained higher education, and, as GDR elites, their socio-economic position was good at least until 1990.

[112] Alan S. Zuckerman and Darrell M. West. 1985. "The Political Bases of Citizen Contacting: A Cross-National Analysis". In: *American Political Science Review* 79(1) (1985), pp. 117–131; here p. 119.

Conclusion

What becomes clear is that the strategies used by OKV organizations since the 1990s reveal a number of similarities with complaint and legal practices in the GDR, and we may assume that GDR practices at least contributed to the strategic choices of OKV organizations in unified Germany.

Continuity is most obviously found on the level of practice. OKV activists seem most comfortable using strategies that were available to them already in the GDR, including petitioning and contacting politicians. Although OKV members participate in demonstrations, they do not organize them, leaving this task to other socialist forces like the SED successor party.

At the same time, strategies have clearly been adjusted to the reality of united Germany. The best example for this are the many legal complaints lodged by OKV organizations and, especially, by ISOR. Although legal complaints can be related to GDR legal procedures and patterns of petitioning, ISOR was quick to respond to the completely new quality that complaints obtained after unification: instead of innocuous pleas to authorities they bring legal complaints before neutral courts, using professional legal advice. Choosing legalistic approaches over mass mobilization is clearly also motivated by the very limited public support for OKV demands.

Yet the reliance on legalistic strategies also makes clear how the OKV actually functions within the parameters of the German state, thereby strengthening the system rather than weakening it. To be sure, many observers have depicted the OKV as a dangerous organization, mainly because its membership consists of former Stasi employees who continue to downplay GDR wrongs. As the previous chapters have shown, OKV members indeed lament the fall of the GDR, and they remain convinced that the GDR was the "better Germany" – for better or for worse. Related, they also continue to decry the FRG's alleged social, political and judicial wrongs. As we have seen, such narratives are rooted in the life experiences of OKV members as loyal and successful GDR citizens. They have been intensified by the loss of social and professional status, and, maybe most of all, of ideological grip, that OKV members have experienced after the fall of the Berlin wall. Even so, OKV organizations rarely challenge the limits of what is accepted: in addition to the incident at Berlin Hohenschönhausen in March 2006, some former Stasi officers visit the Stasi prison memorial individually to speak out against former victims who serve as tour guides. Yet at

the same time, their activities to effect change show that OKV activists are obviously accepting the current political system rather than trying to radically change it. In this sense, the methods of the OKV groups reflect their lack of public support and their increasingly limited political contacts, as well as the narrow group of beneficiaries targeted by their demands.

Chapter 5:
Left Without Its Party: OKV Attempts at Linkage

It has been widely recognized that the past has a tremendous impact upon political attitudes in the present.[1] Accordingly, differences between people's attitudes towards "the left" in Eastern and Western Europe are usually explained by the effects of socialization on political preferences and people's understanding of the left – right ideological scale, as well as by country-specific post-socialist economic performances and the political role of former ruling parties in the new political landscape.[2] The positive OKV memory of the GDR, and its rejection of social and political conditions in unified Germany, are a clear case in point.

The previous chapters studied OKV as a conglomerate of organizations united by their memory culture and their political habitus which, with some adaptations, reproduces GDR understandings of politics and patterns of action. In this chapter we will look at OKV as a part of the all-German political spectrum, and in particular at their attempts to link up with other leftist groups and parties, especially with Germany's most prominent radical left party *Die Linke*, which grew out of the GDR ruling party SED (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*). Although the OKV officially claims to be nonpartisan, all associated organizations understand the OKV as being radical left in outlook. OKV members whom I interviewed stated their support for radical left parties, of which many of them are members. This opens up the broader perspective of locating OKV in the post-socialist left landscape of unified Germany, and in relation to the main cleavages between different left movements and organizations. My major argument is that OKV strategies for linkage, and in particular their shortcomings, can again be explained by its members' activities in, and understandings of, the GDR.

Whereas OKV organizations continue to evaluate the SED's one-party rule in East Germany as a laudable, if failed, attempt at establishing an egalitarian and antifascist society, "new left" organizations regard such a justification of the former regime as fundamentally

[1] Grigore Pop-Eleches and Joshua A. Tucker, "After the Party: Legacies and Left-Right Distinctions in Post-Communist Countries". Paper prepared for presentation at the *2010 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association* (Washington DC: 2–5 September 2010), p. 3. Accessed 13 March 2015. http://www.princeton.edu/~gpop/LR%20Legacies%20GPE%20JAT%20APSA%202010.pdf

[2] Geoffrey Evans and Stephen Whitefield, "Identifying the Bases of Party Competition in Eastern Europe". In: *British Journal of Political Science* 23 (1993), pp. 521–48; Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism and Myth in Post-Communist Societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998); Joshua A. Tucker, *Regional Economic Voting: Russia, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, 1990–99* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2006).

flawed, and irreconcilable with left aspirations to political liberty and diversity.[3] The continuing public debates on the GDR legacy, which tend to portray socialism as an inherently repressive ideology, as well as personal experiences with the former socialist state, make it nearly impossible for actors not to position themselves towards the GDR.

Diverging understandings of the past coincide with diverging political preferences and activities, and with fundamental differences in what is understood as being "left". These differences correspond roughly to cleavages between the "traditional" and the "new" left, and between left movements in the former socialist East and those that originated in the capitalist West. On the "traditional - new" left axis, cleavages result from whether actors focus on socio-economic egalitarian or socio-cultural libertarian values. Differences on the "West–East" axis are related to the specific historical heritage of the left in countries that experienced authoritarian socialist ruling parties and elites, and in those that did not.

As I will argue, the specific heritage of "socialist authoritarianism" makes the cleavages between the "traditional East" and all other types of left movements and organizations so profound that they effectively foreclose alliance building and joint action – because a lack of shared political values and traditions and different organizational cultures impede the formulation of shared collective action frames.[4] Although marginal in the broader political debate, the OKV is one of the largest organizations that self-identifies as radical left in united Germany. However, the OKV's persistent apology for the GDR stands in the way of meaningful cooperation with any other left organizations and parties that do not share this appreciation of the former socialist state on German soil. Adherence to organizational culture and structures of GDR times likewise forecloses environmental linkage[5] with other radical left organizations, including with *Die Linke*, but also with smaller interest organizations whose goals otherwise coincide with those of the OKV.

This is remarkable in so far as OKV, as an organisation commonly associated with the Stasi, is aware of the fact that it enjoys very limited discursive opportunities.[6] In spite of a

[3] Donatella della Porta and Dieter Rucht, "Left-Libertarian Movements in Context: A Comparison of Italy and West Germany, 1965–1990". In: B. Klandermans, C. Jenkins (eds.), *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspectives on States and Social Movements* (Minneapolis and St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press 1995), pp. 229–272.

[4] Robert Benford and David Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment". In: *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000), pp. 611–639; here p. 614.

[5] Myrto Tsakatika and Marco Lisi, "'Zippin' up My Boots, Goin'Back to My Roots': Radical Left Parties in Southern Europe". In: *South European Society and Politics*, 18:1 (2013), pp. 1–19.

[6] On discursive opportunities, see Ruud Koopmans and Susan Olzak, "Discursive Opportunities and the Evolution of Right-Wing Violence in Germany". In: *American Journal of Sociology* 110(1) (2004), pp. 198–230; here p. 202.

significant spectrum of activities, and a considerable dedication to their goals, OKV has on the whole not managed to achieve its goals: pension reductions for Stasi members are still in place, and the judicial opportunities are exhausted; the cherishing of Ernst Thälmann and other communist antifascists continues to loose ground to the standard German forms of commemorating Nazi victims; and the Palace of the Republic has been removed from the cityscape of Berlin. This list could be continued. One would therefore expect OKV to seek cooperation with groups capable of attracting broader support in society. Such partners might make up for the generational impasse in which the OKV finds itself, and generate the public pressure that would help OKV to attain some of its practical goals.

Indeed, while the agenda of OKV and its subsidiaries is closely tied to the heritage of the GDR in general, and to the Stasi in particular, the OKV tries to connect this with a broader resentment in the former GDR against the way in which West Germany "appropriated the East". They attempt to frame their very particular grievances as resulting from the general "mistreatment" of the new *Bundesländer* (i.e., the former GDR territories) by the old FRG. Likewise, their activities also include advocacy for social rights more broadly, especially for East Germans and the elderly (in line with the OKV's core constituency of elderly East German citizens). The OKV is thus torn between narrow interests of the former elites and a broader GDR /"Eastern" identity. However, OKV attempts to reach a larger public generally fail to resonate. Its claims to represent common interests lack credibility due to the public disapproval of the erstwhile activities of the Stasi, and the OKV's continued defence of its former co-workers.

This situation requires OKV to rethink its strategies. As the legal venues discussed in chapter four lose their centrality, OKV has now more leeway to shift to radical approaches, and thus also to choose more radical political partners. The increasing age of the OKV members moreover requires to build bridges to other organizations that have a younger membership base. Yet more than 25 years after reunification, the course of this organization is not easy to change. As we will see in the last part of this chapter, internal dynamics oriented towards the preservation of GDR identity prevail over goal-oriented strategies. My argument is that, in the end, it is this preservation of a common identity, based on the GDR's state socialist ideology, that matters most to OKV members. This is what is central to their self-image, including to how they perceive their position toward other political activists and the state.

After the divorce: OKV and SED/PDS/*Die Linke*

Let us start with a brief look at how German left parties represented in parliament relate to OKV. That the German Greens have little sympathy for the interest organization of former Stasi members is no wonder: in 1990 the Greens incorporated a large part of the GDR human rights activists (*Bündnis '90*) – that is, by and large the Stasi victims – to form *Bündnis '90/Grünen*. Also the center-left *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD) emphasizes, under public pressure, its distance to former SED politics and politicians; former ordinary SED members interested in joining the Social Democratic Party had to go through strenuous review procedures to attest to their personal integrity. This led many to give up on their ambition to join the Social Democratic Party. The irony of this was not lost on PDS politicians of that time, who managed to keep part of their constituency because the SPD rejected them. Reflecting on the situation of the SED-PDS in 1989, when the party went from 2.3 to 0.5 million members, Hans Modrow said:

> What did help [to keep some members] was that the SPD did not want them. There were many who, had they been welcome, would immediately have joined the SPD. But [that party] was not open to them. Whom you fight, will also fight [back].[7]

Indeed, OKV members regard both the SPD and the Greens as "not really left" and voice little sympathy for either of these parties. Instead, they continue to understand themselves as victims of the "anti-communist" and "imperialist" policies of nearly all parliamentarian parties, including *B'90/Grünen* and SPD, which according to the OKV delegitimize the GDR in order to make current-day capitalism appear without alternatives. In the words of OKV board member Hans Bauer:

> I am open for everything. But from non-left parties, there is no interest [to associate with us]. They think, aha, [this is a] Stasi organization! Yes, and that's it [why they keep us at distance]. So for us, the only option is [to work with] the left parties and peace organizations. And there, we are principally open.[8]

In parliament, the most attractive political partner for OKV was and still is the indirect SED-successor party *Die Linke*, now the biggest radical left party of Germany with a rather stable support base of around 8 percent of the national constituency.[9] Reflecting the party's

[7] Interview with Hans Modrow, 26 November 2013.
[8] Conversation with Hans Bauer, 12 December 2013.
[9] *Die Linke* has rather consistently polled around 8-9 percent of the votes over the past two years. However, the recent volatility of party support in Germany and the rise of new political parties (such as the AfD) makes it difficult to predict support levels even for the near future. See also Amieke Bouma, "Ideological Confirmation

origins, support levels in East Germany are much higher than those in West Germany. As practically all OKV activists were ideologically committed SED members, many of them automatically became members of its new incarnations, the PDS (*Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus*/Party of Democratic Socialism), then *Linkspartei*, now *Die Linke*. Yet the PDS/*Die Linke* comprises not only comrades with "traditional East German" political views but also younger people who joined the party for very different reasons, and has been expanding its presence in the western federal states of Germany.[10]

But in the early 1990s, the PDS was still dominated by former SED members, and presented itself as an "Eastern German interest party". In fact, the PDS was even instrumental to the establishment of the OKV, which, as we have seen, originally seems to have been intended as a "transmission belt" of organizations around the party.[11]

Yet the PDS also sought recognition in the whole of unified Germany, including by distancing itself from former Stasi representatives. When in December 1989 an Extraordinary Congress of the SED decided not to abolish the SED but instead to continue under a new name (first SED-PDS, then PDS), the party also came up with a new "democratic socialist" program, according to which the party would "irrevocably break with Stalinism as a system". It was held that Stalinism did not end with Stalin's death in 1953; rather, the Organizational Committee of the 1989 congress (which included such SED big shots as Heinz Vietze and long-time director of the Stasi's Foreign Intelligence Department Markus Wolf) argued that even in the 1970s and 1980s, the GDR was still in a phase of "prolonged Stalinism".[12] A vague distinction was made between "good" socialism, as the attempt to realize the socialist society envisioned by Marx and Engels, and "bad, pseudo-socialist" Stalinism, which was now denounced as an "administrative-centralist" organizational principle and a "deterministic" ideology "incapable of adjustments".[13]

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and Party Consolidation: Germany's Die Linke and the Financial and Refugee Crises". In: Luke March and Dan Keith (eds.), *Europe's Radical Left. From Marginality to the Mainstream?* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International 2016), pp. 133-154; here pp. 135-137.

[10] Ibid., pp. 135; 142-143.

[11] David Patton, *Out of the East: From PDS to Left Party in Unified Germany* (Albany: SUNY 2011), pp. 69–73.

[12] Michael Schumann, "Wir brechen unwiderruflich mit dem Stalinismus als System! Referat auf dem Außerordentlichen Parteitag der SED in Berlin am 16. Dezember 1989". In: Wolfram Adolphi (ed.), Michael Schumann, *Hoffnung PDS. Reden Aufsätze, Entwürfe 1989–2000* (Berlin: Dietz 2004), pp. 33–56.

[13] Ernst Wurl and Jochen Cerný, "Zur Stalinismus-Debatte. 50 Jahre nach dem XX. Parteitag der KPdSU. Erklärung der Historischen Kommission beim Parteivorstand der Linkspartei.PDS" (7 February 2006), p. 8. Accessed 13 March 2015: http://www.bodo-ramelow.de/fileadmin/bodoramelow/Dokumente/Kommunismus-Vergangenheit/Stalinismus-Debatte_Historische-Kommission-2006.pdf.

The Stalinism debate within the PDS soon became central to a struggle for the ideological identity of the party. Within the PDS, a Communist Platform (*Kommunistische Plattform*) agitated against the party's rueful condemnation of "Stalinism"; for this wing, any critical evaluation of the GDR only served to discredit socialism as a whole, and to obscure what had indeed been "better" (compared to the FRG) in the GDR.[14] On 18 May 1995, a group of 38 prominent PDS members issued a proclamation titled *In grosser Sorge* ("With Deep Concern"), in which they warned against the PDS' move away from Marxism. The signatories decried the "social-democratization" of the party, and the suppression of party pluralism through an "eerie battle within our own ranks under the absurd slogan of 'reformers against Stalinists'".[15] This proclamation, published in the left-wing (and former SED) newspaper *Neues Deutschland*, led to the emergence of a "Marxist Forum" within the PDS.

Eventually the PDS established a working consensus according to which diverging opinions within the party were accepted in the name of pluralism (*Pluralismus-Prinzip*). This principle was supposed to signal the break with the scorned "administrative-centralized Stalinism", while at the same time keeping as many members on board as possible.

Thus in principle both the left ("Marxist") and right ("democratic socialist") wings of the party remained welcome. But over time a majority of PDS/*Linke* politicians favored a move away from the SED heritage and toward a more moderate left course. A clear break with the past was needed for liberating the PDS from its pariah status in German politics and for eventually participating in (regional) governments. And indeed, partially abandoning its GDR heritage enabled the party to join government coalitions in several East German federal states (*Bundesländer*), in particular in the city state of Berlin, where it governed in a coalition with the SPD from 2002 to 2011.

Yet as a PDS History Commission concluded in 2006, the condemnation of SED Stalinism was especially resented by "older members [of the party] who 'grew up' with the Stalin cult", and "for whom the Stalinist-influenced SED constituted the logical shape of a genuine socialist party", legitimized through the progressive example of the USSR and its role in World War II.[16] Elderly members in particular complained that Stalinism became a

[14] Michael Nelken, "Schwierigkeiten einer Emanzipation vom Stalinismus: zur Stalinismusdebatte in der PDS". In: *Utopie kreativ: Diskussion sozialistischer Alternativen* 65 (1996), pp. 41–48.
[15] Heinz Beinert (ed.), *Die PDS – Phönix oder Asche? Eine Partei auf dem Prüfstand* (Berlin: Aufbau 1995), p. 227.
[16] Wurl and Cerný, "Zur Stalinismus-Debatte", p. 5.

"defamatory term" to denounce "all that appears left-socialist, past and present".[17] This adequately represents the view of most OKV activists, whether they remain *Linke* members or not.

A parallel debate raged over the link between the SED and the Stasi. Most employees of the Stasi had been SED members, and they constituted a significant part of the PDS membership base that remained after 1989. In the years that followed, the PDS was repeatedly confronted with public revelations demonstrating that some of their prominent politicians had worked as informants (*Informelle Mitarbeiter*) of the former MfS, and had been silent about this after the end of the GDR. The continued association with the much-hated secret service of the GDR damaged the PDS' self-image as a "normal" political party. This prompted the PDS as early as 1991 to call upon its representatives to go public in case they had been involved with the Stasi.[18] The PDS also adopted resolutions against the prosecution of people for their activities for the Stasi,[19] and demanded that any involvement with the MfS should be examined on an individual basis.[20]

Although the PDS thus advocated against political and judicial measures against Stasi members, it simultaneously adopted policies that were meant to distance the SED successor party from the GDR secret service. This also extended to the Stasi's former employees: In 1991, then PDS leader Gregor Gysi stated that the PDS was "not a trade union" and "also not a therapeutic organization" for former Stasi members.[21] At that moment, however, former GDR cadres still made up the majority of party members. It can be assumed that one of the reasons the PDS supported the creation of the OKV was in fact because it led former Stasi officers to organize their activities outside of the Party structures. Unsurprisingly, many of the OKV activists are deeply disappointed by this turn of events. The logical paradox is that the more the PDS won influence in all-German politics, and could therefore have been more

[17] Ibid.
[18] PDS, "Zur konsequenten, offenen und öffentlichen Auseinandersetzung der PDS mit der Problematik 'Staatssicherheit'". Beschluss der 2. Tagung des 2. Parteitages (21 - 23 June 1991). Accessed 30 December 2013:
http://archiv2007.sozialisten.de/partei/geschichte/beschluesse_umgang_mfs/view_html?zid=32968&bs=1&n=7
[19] PDS, "Gegen Strafverfolgung wegen nachrichtendienstlicher Tätigkeit." Beschluss der 2. Tagung des 2. Parteitages (21- 23 June 1991).' Accessed 30 December 2013:
http://archiv2007.sozialisten.de/partei/geschichte/beschluesse_umgang_mfs/view_html?zid=32970&bs=1&n=5
[20] Michael Schumann, "Souverän mit unserer politischen Biografie umgehen". Referat auf der 1. Tagung des 3. Parteitages (29- 31 January 1993). Accessed 30 December 2013:
http://archiv2007.sozialisten.de/partei/geschichte/beschluesse_umgang_mfs/view_html?zid=32971&bs=1&n=4
[21] "Raubzug auf die Rente: Ehemalige DDR-Soldaten und Stasi-Mitarbeiter organisieren sich - zum 'Schutz ihrer sozialen Rechte'". In: *Der Spiegel* (29 July 1991). Retrieved February 19, 2014.

useful for promoting OKV interests, the less interested the party became in providing such support.

As a consequence, many OKV members feel rejected by the PDS/*Die Linke*. Moreover, the lack of party support for their position with hindsight undermines the image that they had of their relation with the SED. Most OKV members considered themselves loyal members who worked in the interest of party and state, even if they report that they were critical of some party policies.[22] Yet ultimately, OKV members in general stayed loyal to the Party, and especially to its ideology, even after the fall of the GDR. That the PDS did not fully support former Stasi cadres, and, even more, allowed for criticism of GDR policies and politics that undermines GDR ideology, is seen as a betrayal. In return, some OKV members renounced their party membership, while others remained in *Die Linke* only as passive members. This is a bigger step than it might seem at first, considering that many OKV members had been Party members for several decades. From the interviews with OKV leaders, it became clear that Klaus Wons[23] and Eberhard Schulz [24] left the Party; Helmut Holfert[25] and Siegfried Mechler[26] became passive members; Hans Bauer[27] and Wolfgang Schmidt[28] were not very enthusiastic either. Only Rudolf Denner[29] still champions *Die Linke*.

Yet despite many OKV members' disappointment in *Die Linke*, the latter remains the only party in parliament that is still somewhat concerned with the OKV's financial and juridical interests.[30] And indeed, *Die Linke* still launches activities that directly connect to the OKV agenda; in November 2013, for instance, the party argued that a parliamentary report on the use of doping in West German sports partly vindicated former GDR sports functionaries, several of whom are represented in the OKV's *Freundeskreis der Sport-Senioren* (FdS). In the 1990s such functionaries had been subject to prosecution for their involvement in GDR doping programs, and they consistently defended themselves by pointing to the normalcy of doping programs at the time, also in the FRG. In an interview in November 2012, FdS-chair

[22] In fact, all respondents criticised at least some of Honecker's policies; usually, criticism was directed at Honeckers' failure to conduct the political and economic reforms that my informants believe could have saved the GDR. Other points of critique included the lack of tolerance for sexual diversity (Schulz, Schmidt) and (raised even by former Stasi members), the pervasiveness of surveillance.
[23] Interview with Klaus Wons, 10 July 10 2012.
[24] Interview with Eberhard Schulz, 9 July 2012.
[25] Interview with Helmut Holfert, 10 July 2012.
[26] Interview with Siegfried Mechler, 12 July 2012.
[27] Interview with Hans Bauer, 14 June 2012.
[28] Interview with Wolfgang Schmidt, 12 June 2012.
[29] Interviews with Rudolf Denner, 10 July 2012; 8 November 2012.
[30] In the run-up to the September 2013 *Bundestag* elections, several OKV organizations advised their members to vote for *Die Linke* for this reason (interview with Wolfgang Schmidt, 28 November 2013).

Erhard Richter lauded *Die Linke* for its support in this matter.[31] But most OKV members feel that the efforts of *Die Linke* are insufficient, and relations with the party as a whole are marked by friction.

However, *Die Linke* has several prominent politicians that still cater to the interests of the OKV. This includes Gesine Lötzsch, vice-chairman of *Die Linke* in parliament and the direct *Bundestag* representative for the Berlin district of Lichtenberg where many former Stasi employees reside. Lötzsch was guest speaker on several OKV events, which earned her considerable critique from other parties.[32] She was also a staunch opponent of the demolition of the Palace of the Republic. In 2013 she attended the opening of a temporary exhibition of the OKV organization *Freundeskreis Palast der Republik* (FPdR), where she claimed that the now-demolished "People's Palace" (as the GDR's parliament and its huge cultural centre) had been a "real" house of the people, in contrast to the current parliament building in Berlin, the *Reichstag*. Obviously, her continued statements are greatly appreciated by OKV members, especially those of the FPdR.[33] Also active within the OKV is Heinrich Fink, the former rector of the Humboldt University in East Berlin, who was released from his function in 1992 after allegations of cooperation with the Stasi. From 1998 until 2001, Fink was member of parliament for the PDS. He is the chair of the *Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes/ Bund der Antifaschisten* (VVN-BdA) and was in 2013 awarded the Human Rights Prize of the GBM.[34]

Patron or traitor? Hans Modrow as a political mediator

But the most important linking figure between OKV and *PDS/Linkspartei/Linke* is still Hans Modrow. Born in January 1928, he belongs to the older members of the OKV generation. As one of the most prominent politicians of the Wende-period, Modrow's life story has been recorded in several biographical and autobiographical accounts. Like OKV members, Modrow starts his narrative of coming to socialism with World War II, and he as well describes the experiences of those years as having a "formative" influence on his character.[35]

[31] Interview with Erhard Richter, 7 November 2012.
[32] Dietmar Neuerer, "Lafontaine-Nachfolgerin pflegt Kontakte ins Stasi-Milieu." In: *Handelsblatt* (27 January 2010). Accessed on 1 November 2016: http://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/deutschland/gesine-loetzsch-lafontaine-nachfolgerin-pflegt-kontakte-ins-stasi-milieu/3355336.html.
[33] Interview with Rudolf Denner, 10 December 2013.
[34] "Ehrung für Heinrich Fink". In: *Junge Welt* (18 December 2013).
[35] Hans Modrow, *Ich wollte ein neues Deutschland* (Berlin: Dietz 1998), p. 24.

At age fourteen, Modrow started his training as a mechanical locksmith in a "company that was fully geared towards armament".[36] Around that time, he also joined the fireguard division of the Hitler Jugend, something which Modrow saw as a logical decision following the "entire ideology that was spread in school."[37] Other wartime experiences he recounts from growing up in the Pommeranian village of Jasenitz are air attacks and the deaths of fellow villagers.[38] When he was seventeen, Modrow was drafted into the *Volkssturm*, a militia of German males between 16 and 60 not yet drafted into the regular army that was set up during the last months of the war. Modrow was then captured by the Soviet army and sent to a POW camp, where he became influenced by antifascist ideology. Modrow was eventually recruited by the camp's "antifa committee" for education at one of the "antifa schools" that had been set up by the Soviets in order to re-educate German POWs.[39] The antifa school in Riazan, Russia, had a big influence on Modrow, and he later repeatedly stressed how impressed he was by its teachers, several of whom had been active in the antifascist resistance during the war. Among them were Robert Naumann, a German veteran communist who was at the time the school's leader, and Fritz Rink, who actively encouraged Modrow's career, and with whom Modrow says to have had a "father-son-relationship".[40] That is, Modrow attests to the importance of personal connections and the warm relations with strong communist personalities who for him fulfilled the function of a father. By contrast, his own father he remembers as a strict and ruthless man.[41] After the war, Modrow had barely any contact with his parents and siblings, who had moved to the Hamburg region in West Germany.

In January 1949 Modrow returned from Soviet captivity to East Germany, where he soon joined SED and FDJ. He shortly resumed his previous profession as locksmith but was soon recruited for a political career. Still in 1949, Modrow was elected to the regional board

[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid, p. 25.
[38] Ibid, p. 27.
[39] For more on memories of antifascist conversions in POW camps, see Christiane Wienand, "Remembered change and changes of remembrance: East German narratives of Anti-fascist conversion". In: Mary Fulbrook and Andrew Port (eds.), *Becoming East German: Socialist structures and sensibilities after Hitler* (New York: Berghahn Books 2015 [first ed. 2013]), pp. 99-120; on antifa committees and antifa schools, see here p. 101.
[40] Alexander Thomas, "Hans Modrow, 'Geschichte, an der ich teilhabe'". In: Cornelia Siebeck, Alexander Schug and Alexander Thomas (eds.), *Verlorene Zeiten? DDR-Lebensgeschichten im Rückblick – eine Interviewsammlung* (Berlin: Vergangenheitsverlag 2010), pp. 22–33; here p. 27; Modrow, *Ich wollte ein neues Deutschland*, p. 24; Kathrin Höhne and Maren Martell, "Hans Modrow: Wichtige Voraussetzung für Freiheit ist soziale Gleichheit". In: Höhne and Martell, *Meine Freiheit: Geschichten aus Deutschland* (Berlin: Epubli 2014), 9 pages; here p. 4.
[41] Modrow, *Ich wollte ein neues Deutschland*, pp. 25-6.

of the FDJ Brandenburg.[42] In 1951, he was ordered by then-FDJ leader Erich Honecker to take up a position of representative in the *Landtag* of Mecklenburg.[43] This was followed by positions in the *Landtag* of Berlin (1953-71) and the GDR *Volkskammer* (1958-1990). From 1973 until 1989 Modrow was also the SED's regional leader in Dresden.

When the USSR started Perestroika, Modrow was seen as a reformer, and as Gorbachev's ally in the GDR (although Modrow himself claims that this is based on a misinterpretation[44]). Immediately after the Fall of the Wall, on 13 November 1989, he became GDR prime minister, and with a government that included oppositional Round Table politicians Modrow started negotiations on German unification with both Moscow and Bonn. He lost the position of prime minister after the free *Volkskammer* elections of 18 March 1990, but continued his career as MP for the PDS in the German parliament (1990–1994) and in the European parliament (1999–2004). In February 1990 Modrow became honorary chairman of the PDS, and since 2007 he is chair of *Die Linke*'s advisory Council of Elders (*Ältestenrat*), reflecting his prominent standing in the party.

Yet his reputation as a GDR reformer did not protect Modrow from juridical prosecution. In the 1990s Modrow was convicted of having organized election fraud in his capacity as *Bezirksleiter* in Dresden. As a member of the GDR's political leadership he has furthermore been affected by the pension reductions that target former Stasi co-workers and their political superiors (*Weisungsbefugte*). This brings him close to OKV core organizations as the GRH, established to organize support and solidarity for prosecuted GDR functionaries, and ISOR, which fights against pension reductions.

It would therefore seem that Hans Modrow is ideally positioned to guarantee the link between the OKV and *Die Linke*. Yet ironically, Modrow is a controversial figure in both organizations. Within *Die Linke*, his continuous efforts to justify the GDR disturb a generation of younger, more coalition-minded party activists who want to move away from the GDR heritage. Thus in December 2013 the party decided to honour the "thousands of German Communists and Anti-fascists" who were persecuted, incarcerated or killed not by Nazi Germany but in Stalin's Soviet Union, by mounting a commemoration plaque at *Die*

[42] Karl-Heinz Arnold, *Die ersten hundert Tage des Hans Modrow* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag 1990), p. 107.
[43] Hans Modrow, *Von Schwerin bis Strasbourg. Erinnerungen an ein halbes Jahrhundert Parlamentsarbeit* (Berlin: Edition Ost 2001), p. 12
[44] Interview with Hans Modrow, 26 November 2013; see also Thomas, "Hans Modrow, 'Geschichte, an der ich teilhabe'", p. 30.

Linke's historical party office, the *Karl-Liebknecht-Haus*.[45] This plaque had been requested by a Berlin-based workgroup of the aforementioned VVN-BdA, reflecting a perspective on antifascist heritage less dominated by the GDR's official historiography that also exists within this association.[46] Yet Modrow understood the decision to commemorate the victims of Stalinism *at this specific place* as a further step in *Die Linke*'s renunciation of its SED heritage, and vehemently protested against the move:

> It is the re-interpretation of this memorial [the *Karl-Liebknecht-Haus*] which is a problem for me. It is a memorial because some [communists] came back [from exile in the USSR]. And they established the SED and the GDR. And [now people say] they apparently did too little to condemn the repression [in the Soviet Union]… This is a relativization of what antifascist resistance meant. And this is a Party order (*Parteibeschluss*). The board [of *Die Linke*] *decides for us how and what to think*. And the group which does not agree is not being heard. [47]

Instead, Modrow proposed that the victims of Stalinist repression be commemorated at the Berlin Friedrichsfelde central cemetery.[48]

Notwithstanding Modrow's opposition, the commemoration plaque was placed on 17 December 2013. The above quote from my interview with Modrow on 26 November 2013 reveals several problems in the relation between Modrow and the current party leaders. First, his position regarding the history of the GDR, or those events that should be valued, differs from that of most board members. Secondly, although Modrow in his capacity as chair of the *Ältestenrat* was in fact appointed by the board to advise them,[49] his opinion on the memorial plaque was apparently rejected in such a way that he felt ignored; something which attests to his declining authority within the party. His statement also again reflects *Die Linke*'s

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[45] Die Linke, "Beschluss-Nr.: 2–13/98: Gedenktafel am Karl-Liebknecht-Haus". Beschluss des Parteivorstandes (18-20 October 2013). Accessed 30 December 2013: http://www.die-linke.de/index.php?id=13653Die Linke (2013).

[46] *Arbeitskreis zum Gedenken an die in der sowjetischen Emigration verfolgten, deportierten und ermordeten Antifaschisten* of the Berlin branch of the VVN-BdA. For the workgroup's position, see Inge Münz-Koenen and Wladislaw Hedeler, "Ein Schritt in die richtige Richtung. Zum Beschluss des Parteivorstandes über eine Gedenktafel am Karl-Liebknecht-Haus". In: *Disput-Archiv* (27 November 2013). Accessed 30 December 2013. http://www.die-linke.de/index.php?id=181&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=29912&tx_ttnews[backPid]=154&no_cache=1

[47] Interview with Hans Modrow, 26 November 2013; emphasis mine.

[48] This graveyard was opened in 1881 and soon became known as the "socialist cemetery" because of the many socialists, communists and social democrats buried there. In 1951, a memorial 'cemetery of the socialists' was opened within the graveyard for leading personalities of the GDR. According to Modrow, this cemetery is the place for a "broad history" of the GDR, including its positive and negative aspects.

[49] Die Linke, "Bundessatzung der Partei DIE LINKE" (2012), here §20(7). Last accessed 22 November 2016: https://www.die-linke.de/fileadmin/download/dokumente/bundessatzung_fruehere_fassungen/bundessatzung_goettingen2012.pdf. The *Ältestenrat* already existed within the PDS, and was initiated by Gregor Gysi in January 1990 in order to guarantee continuity of the 'socialist idea' of the party during the "break with the political system of Stalinism". Frank Schumann, *Ostdeutsch oder angepasst. Gysi und Modrow im Streitgespräch* (Berlin: Edition Ost 2013), p. 33.

problems with its internal Stalinism debate: in fact, Modrow turned things upside-down by arguing that placing a memorial for the victims of Stalinism at the Karl-Liebknecht-Haus in itself is an act of "Stalinism" – because this central decision was taken against the will of minorities within the party.[50] According to Modrow, the decision was taken by

> party members (*Linken*) who want to be in government. And this is why we [as a party] are adjusting our view of history.[51]

Obviously Modrow, who himself is well-enough acquainted with the workings of politics, refuses any (further) compromises when it comes to the evaluation of party history. It is important to note that Modrow acknowledged that there were many victims of Stalinism, including many socialists. It was not the historical fact that he was trying to dispute, but rather the in his eyes unacceptable way in which the history of Stalinist repression is used to discredit the GDR and socialism:

> You cannot wipe away (*wegwischen*) the victims [of Stalinism]. But this [their commemoration] is being used for anti-communism![52]

Modrow was visibly aggravated by *Die Linke*'s support for such "anti-communism", which he understands as being directed not only against the party's own past in state socialism, but also against its contemporary left agenda. Yet despite his frustration over *Die Linke*'s more recent political course, Modrow remains active in the party, which to him is as much a matter of identity as of politics:

> Five weeks ago I attended the funeral of an old comrade. He and I both moved to the [prestigious] Stalinallee in 1953. He died aged 93. […] [At the funeral] there was still one other person who had lived with him in the house where he had moved later. But there were only three persons [present at the funeral] who were not direct relatives. And all in his family vote for *Die Linke*. They do not tell their children bad things about the GDR. Because then they would constantly have to tell how miserable their lives had been. Although this was not true, and certainly not for these people [who lived in the Stalinallee]. You should not take away from people their biography and identity.[53]

Modrow's attitude is in many ways commensurate with that of the still-considerable number of *Die Linke* members who wish to honour GDR history and tradition. His position

[50] Interview with Hans Modrow, 26 November 2013.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

within the party reflects *Die Linke*'s difficulties in reconciling this group with those, generally younger, members that are first and foremost interested in the party's contemporary political aspirations.

In the OKV, on the contrary, Modrow is resented precisely for his more future-oriented activities in 1989–1990 when he was concerned with securing the political survival of the PDS. After all, it was Modrow who, as the GDR's prime-minister, was responsible for closing down the Stasi, and many believe it was him who convened a secret meeting in which SED leaders came up with the "scheme" to blame the secret police (and not the SED) for all wrongs committed in the GDR.[54] According to ISOR's acting director Wolfgang Schmidt, whose entire career was with the Stasi, Modrow's course as prime minister was "comprehensible from his point of view. He also had to curb the enormous popular anger."[55] But Schmidt was equally understanding of former Stasi members' misgivings about Modrow:

> There are still these rumors about the meeting in December 1989 at which it was decided to blame the Stasi for everything. […] And whether this [rumor] is true? … Well, at least we can say that the Stasi has been made a scapegoat not only by the enemy but also *by our own side*.[56]

Yet OKV board members realize that they have very limited political opportunities, and appreciate Modrow as their most important gateway to political influence. Whenever he attends OKV meetings this is invariably noted as an important event, and several OKV activists admitted they were proud to interact with a figure of such senior authority.[57] And Modrow is well aware of the personal and political stature that he still holds with the OKV constituency, and indeed does attempt to mobilize leading figures within Die Linke for the OKV's cause. In the interview of November 2013, Modrow told how he was lobbying Gregor Gysi and Dietmar Bartsch to organize a meeting with the OKV, and warning them that not engaging with the OKV would eventually result in the loss of what is still a substantial group of voters to *Die Linke*:

[54] Supposedly participants to this meeting were GDR prime minister Hans Modrow, PDS leader Gregor Gysi, Markus Wolf, and (vice-leader of the PDS) Wolfgang Berghofer. Modrow and Gysi deny the "rumor", which was however confirmed by Berghofer in 2007 (Sven Felix Kellerhoff, "Dolchstoßlegende der SED. Der Historiker Manfred Wilke erklärt, warum Wolfgang Berghofers Erinnerungen Gysi und Modrow in Bedrängnis bringen." In: *Die Welt* [17 April 2007]).
[55] Interview with Wolfgang Schmidt, 28 November 2013.
[56] Ibid.; emphasis mine.
[57] Interviews with Wolfgang Schmidt, 28 November 2013 and Rudolf Denner, 10 December 2013; conversation with Siegfried Mechler, 28 November 2013.

> If we [*Die Linke*] do not make any statement [in support of the OKV's political demands], then you may be sure that... in the coming three *Landtag* elections, in [the East German regions of] Thüringen, Sachsen and Sachsen-Anhalt, we will have losses. Yes, and in Berlin, even more.[58] We will have losses [of votes] there. Because, they [the OKV] call [upon its members] that they vote for *Die Linke*, but *Die Linke*... lets itself be elected and does nothing in return (*lässt sich wählen und tut dann nichts dafür*). We have to make clear what we want to do [for them]. And that is my main effort at the moment, if you wish, and in this I also see a piece of... Yes, I would formulate it like this: My responsibility. Because to the others [in the OKV] I am still the little piece of *power* from the GDR (*das Stückchen Macht aus der DDR*). I have been a *power*... holder. And I... you will notice this when you talk with them, I am equally one of those who are also controversial, because I dissolved the MfS. ... And for this, I am very controversial. But the guys should ask themselves one question: What would have happened if we had not dissolved it [the MfS] that way?[59]

Despite Modrow's efforts, many OKV activists left the party when the latter distanced itself from its history and from its former stalwarts. And a discussion at the OKV board meeting in December 2013 also made clear that its members are divided on whether *Die Linke* is still of any use to the organization at all. According to a more skeptical board member, the OKV has to

> reconsider [its] position towards *Die Linke*. Surely, we can all imagine how this party will further develop…. They just keep us in suspense, but they do nothing for us. To them we are only electoral cattle.[60]

This statement reflects the indignation many OKV members feel over their marginalization in society and even within their former party. Other board members however were quick to take on a moderating role, arguing that *Die Linke* was the only party "through which we can still get any of our positions heard in the Bundestag". Yet when another board member suggested that the OKV presidium should once more contact *Die Linke*, this provoked considerable scepticism:

> What do you mean, we shouldn't wait until they contact us? We tried often enough! They have not been responsive for twenty years![61]

[58] At the time of the interview, national elections had recently taken place two months previously, on 22 September 2013. In these elections, *Die Linke* obtained 8.2 percent of the votes, compared to 11.1 percent of the votes in 2009, when *Die Linke*'s electoral success peaked.
[59] Interview with Hans Modrow, 26 November 2013.
[60] Personal observation, OKV Board Meeting, 12 December 2013.
[61] Personal observation, OKV Board Meeting, 12 December 2013.

The deep frustration that many OKV members feel with *Die Linke* has not changed since late 2013. On the contrary, frustration over the party's relation to its past only increased after *Die Linke*'s decision to sign a coalition agreement with SPD and B'90/Grünen in Thuringia which defined the GDR as an "*Unrechtsstaat*",[62] and in which the three parties agreed "not to cooperate with organizations that relativize GDR-injustice".[63] OKV members are likewise sceptical about ideological developments within the party, which many see as having become "social democratic" (that is, accomodating the capitalist regime) rather than socialist.[64]

Flirting with the DKP

Several active OKV activists are members of the *Deutsche Kommunistische Partei* (DKP), and there are more who believe that "ideologically, the positions of the DKP are very close to ours".[65] The West-German DKP had been sponsored by the Honecker regime, and the party's weekly magazine *Unsere Zeit* continues to defend the Berlin Wall as a necessity for world peace, and as a defence of the GDR from capitalist attempts to "steal" East German qualified workforce.[66] Still, after 1990 the DKP did not court the OKV, and OKV leaders had a low opinion of the DKP. This changed when in 2013 Patrik Köbele became DKP front man; he

[62] Die Linke, SPD, B'90/Grünen, "Koalitionsvertrag zwischen den Parteien DIE LINKE, SPD, BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN für die 6. Wahlperiode des Thüringer Landtags: Thüringen gemeinsam voranbringen – demokratisch, sozial, ökologisch" (Final version, 20 November 2014), p. 2

[63] Ibid., p. 106. After the preliminary coalition agreement was publicized, the OKV sent an indignant letter to the regional board of *Die Linke* in Thüringen (Matthias Werner, "Offener Brief an den LV DIE LINKE Thüringen" [2 October 2014], last accessed 23 November 2016: okv-ev.de/Dokumente/Korrespondenzen/OKVSchreiben _Linke_Thueringen_gez.pdf). The Thuringian *Linke* replied with a letter that differentiated between the political system and everyday life in the GDR and pointed to earlier debates on the past within *Die Linke* as well as the opportunity for political influence that came with the coalition (Susanne Hennig-Wellsow, "Offener Brief and das OKV" [20 October 2014], last accessed 23 November 2016: okv.ev.de/Dokumente/Korrespondenzen/ AntwortLinkeThueringen_OKV_offener_ Brief_201014.pdf). The Kommunistische Plattform in Thüringen wrote an open letter to the OKV in which they invited the association to deeper cooperation (Kommunistische Plattform Thüringen, "Offener Brief an das Ostdeutsche Kuratorum von Verbänden e.V." [November 2014], last accessed 23 November 2016: https://www.die-linke.de/partei/zusammenschluesse/kommunistische-plattform-der-partei-die-linke/ mitteilungen-der-kommunistischen-plattform/detail/artikel/offener-brief-an-das-ostdeutsche-kuratorium-von-verbaenden-ev/).

[64] In particular, several OKV activists mentioned their objections to *Die Linke*'s ideological development of a *Transformationstheorie*, which aims to transform the system in multiple ways, including by building political coalitions for change, that is, "from within". See Bouma, "Ideological Confirmation and Party Consolidation". Examples of criticism on the *Transformationstheorie* can be found in Sebastian Carlens, "Wohin geht Die Linke?" In: *Junge Welt* (18 June 2015); Herbert Meißner, "Geht es um die Transformation des Kapitalismus oder der Partei Die Linke? Über Täuschungsmanöver der gehobenen Art". In: *RotFuchs* 17(209) (2015), p.15.

[65] Conversation with Hans Bauer, 12 December 2013.

[66] As reflected in numerous contributions to the DKP-magazine *Unsere Zeit* from 2002 to 2011.

seems more open to contacts with the OKV than his predecessors.[67] Köbele is from Berlin, and the Berlin branch of the DKP resides in the same building as several OKV organizations (and also *Die Linke*'s Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung).

Köbele, who belongs to the "left wing" of the DKP,[68] has already been engaged in OKV activities. On 18 August 2013 he spoke at the commemoration of KPD-leader Ernst Thälmann (who was shot in the concentration camp of Buchenwald in 1944) that was organized by the *Freundeskreis Ernst-Thälmann-Gedenkstätte*, an organization linked to the OKV. The Berlin branch of the DKP furthermore participates in the "Anti-Fascist Committee against War and Social Theft", an alliance dominated by several OKV organizations that fulfils similar goals as the "linkage organizations" presented in chapter four under cluster six.[69] Emboldened by this apparently favourable change in the DKP leadership, in December 2013 outgoing president Siegfried Mechler called upon the OKV to "examine if relations [with the DKP] can now be improved, also to overcome the divisiveness among the left".[70]

Yet in the past OKV organizations were hesitant to closely cooperate with organizations which, like the DKP, were in their eyes "too radical" or potentially operating outside the law.[71] Also, a conflict within the DKP over the party line raised questions about the stability of the DKP as a partner. In February 2014, disgruntled DKP members established a "Marxist Left".[72] A short year later, Köbele accompanied his announcement to stand for re-election as party leader with a warning that he would personally "take efforts to ensure that no comrade who played a leading role in the fractioning [of the party] will be elected to the future leadership of the party".[73] Köbele's comfortable re-election in November 2015 suggests that tensions have been largely resolved. However, instead of close cooperation, the DKP seems more interested in incorporating the OKV as a subsidiary

[67] Interviews with Siegfried Mechler, 28 November 2013 and Matthias Werner, 8 May 2015; conversation with Hans Bauer, 12 December 2013.
[68] On the internal struggles between the Party's "leftists" and "rightist functionaries", which were decided in favour of the "leftists" with the election of Köbele, see Christian Klemm, "Richtungskampf in der DKP. Parteitag trifft Entscheidung mit Wahl des neuen Vorsitzenden." In: *Neues Deutschland* (22 February 2013).
[69] The *Antifaschistisches Komitee gegen Krieg und Sozialraub* also includes the DKP, the KPD, and the *Aktionsbündnis Ernst-Thälmann-Denkmal Berlin*.
[70] Personal observation at the OKV Board Meeting, 12 December 2013.
[71] Interview with Rudolf Denner, 10 December 2013.
[72] Marxistische Linke, "Marxistische Linke: Erklärung der Gründungsversammlung." (2014). Accessed 11 March 2015: http://www.kommunisten.de/attachments/4901_Erklärung_marxistische_linke.pdf
[73] Patrik Köbele, "Zur Vorbereitung des 21. Parteitages der DKP". In: *DKP-Informationen* 1 (2015), pp. 17–18; here p. 18.

organization. Given that the DKP has only about 3,500 members,[74] this is not an attractive perspective for the OKV, which claims to still have 20,000 associates.[75]

Still more marginal is the KPD (Communist Party of Germany), which some other OKV members said they joined. This is not the old KPD but a group founded by SED hardliners who opposed the "destalinization" course of the SED/PDS, reportedly comprising some 300 members.[76] The OKV also does not seem to have warm contacts with the Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany (MLPD), a party with West-German Maoist origins that boasts ca. 1,900 members.

While there is no doubt that the overwhelming majority of OKV members are "dormant", and that numbers are declining at a fast pace due to ageing and natural loss, OKV organizations are probably right in regarding their "high degree of organization" as the key to their (relative) effectiveness. In 2012, ISOR acting director Wolfgang Schmidt noted that he can still mobilize a considerable group of former Stasi men to show up at public events in order to voice their view on history, and to defend the image of the GDR's secret service (in this case, the protest staged at a public meeting at a memorial to Stasi victims in Berlin Hohenschönhausen).[77] When, at a meeting in December 2013, the OKV's board discussed the vital need to attract new members, GRH-chair Hans Bauer objected that the current "strength" of OKV organizations lies exactly in their close-knit organizational structure. After the meeting, he also voiced his personal view that any attempt to attract new members would mean to put the core OKV concerns on the backburner: the interests of GDR functionaries and politicians would, in the case of cooperation, become no more than a small issue within a larger left agenda.[78]

Moreover, the overwhelming majority of OKV activists consists of men above the age of seventy who spent their lives for the most part in the GDR as loyal citizens, and who are unwilling to participate in the contentious political activities advocated by younger left groups. And as long as OKV's more substantial organizations (ISOR, GRH) still attempt to advocate their interests through the *Linke*-faction in parliament as well as in the courts, they

[74] DKP membership figures are not published on the official website of the party, but see DKP, "Fragen und Antworten zur DKP" (2016). Accessed 7 April 2016: http://www.kommunisten.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=334&Itemid=175.DKP (2016).
[75] Interview with Matthias Werner, 8 May 2015.
[76] Interview with Eberhard Schulz, 9 July 2012.
[77] Interview with Wolfgang Schmidt, 8 August 2013; for more information, see also chapter four, pp.174-176.
[78] Conversation with Hans Bauer, 12 December 2013.

do not want to be associated with radical left organizations, especially as some of them, including the DKP and the MLPD, are officially monitored by Germany's security service.[79]

That the OKV is still interested in collaborating with an established party could easily be explained as a reflex resulting from its members' previous marriage to the SED. Yet the difficulties in establishing such relations also show that the OKV is not very willing to make compromises. As we have seen, many OKV members see themselves as "social outcasts against their will", with their attempts at integration being frustrated by Germany's political system. The structure of the OKV fosters the close-knit identity of the group of activists by maintaining a specific organizational model and tradition in the spirit of the GDR. This is most obvious when it comes to old political and work floor hierarchies. OKV members cultivate a certain image not only of the GDR but more importantly of their own lives as citizens who had made it within that state. Most OKV members come from the *Aufsteiger*-generation that came of age directly after the end of World War II. They enjoyed the opportunity to study and could advance their careers relatively easy as generations before them were thinned out, or compromised, by the Nazi regime and the war. In the GDR, they became not only spies and politicians, but also foreign traders, public attorneys and professors, and in these capacities they ran the GDR. Today they continue to cherish a picture of themselves as ideological champions of a better world, also by contrast to the younger generations of GDR citizens who lacked their ideological fervour.[80] For them, critique on the GDR is a negation of their own history, a "devaluation of [their] life achievements."[81] Their current activities reflect their former positions and higher education: they organize cultural evenings and events, and they protest against the perceived "injustice" through juridical avenues and by writing books and pamphlets, rather than taking to the streets. It is their past that unites them, and that ultimately keeps them isolated as a group.

Connections beyond the party spectrum

Given the frustration with the existing radical left parties, OKV tries to reach out to small leftist organizations that focus on issues that the OKV shares. Cooperation is easiest with organizations that once had links to the Honecker regime.

[79] Innenministerium Baden-Württemberg, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2014* (Stuttgart: Innenministerium Baden-Württemberg 2015), pp. 235–239.
[80] Wolfgang Schmidt noted with regret the lack of ideological fervor in later, "pragmatic" generations, even among Stasi members. Interview with Wolfgang Schmidt, 12 June 2012.
[81] Conversation with Hans Bauer, 12 December 2013.

One of these is the VVN-BdA,[82] mentioned above in relation to the commemoration plaque at the Karl-Liebknecht-Haus. The VVN-BdA emerged in 2002 when the East-German Union of Antifascists (BdA) merged with the West-German Association of Victims of Nazi Persecution (VVN). The GDR had been the biggest sponsor of the VVN, which was set up by and for people persecuted by the Nazis for *political* reasons – that is, especially communists. Also, the antifascism of the VVN has always been linked to its members' personal experience of Nazi atrocities. Although the VVN-BdA does participate in the big demonstrations against the annual Neo-Nazi marches in Dresden, which are largely organized by the *Antifaschistische Aktion*,[83] it does not include this or other more militant anti-fascist groups among its members.

The controversy over the commemorative plaque at the *Karl-Liebknecht-Haus* is indicative of the differences that exist within the VVN-BdA: Although all members of this organization identify with the socialist resistance against the Nazis, not all are equally attached to the GDR's political program of antifascism. The VVN-BdA left the OKV by 2015, but several of its subsidiary organizations are still close to the OKV. The holiday resort of *Heideruh*, which was established in 1945 in the same anti-fascist tradition, is a member of both VVN-BdA and OKV.[84] Other OKV partners in West Germany are equally focused on issues of memory, including the "Initiative for the Rehabilitation of the Victims of the Cold War" based in Essen, as well as a communist-run GDR-museum (*DDR-Kabinett*) in Bochum[85] and the *Kuratorium Gedenkstätte Ernst Thälmann* in Hamburg.[86]

But in other cases OKV was unable to establish alliances with associations that have the same practical goals, especially if these potential partners have no past links to the GDR. This is obvious in the context of the OKV efforts to preserve the Palace of the Republic in East Berlin. The protection of the *Palast* (which had been opened in 1976) as positive GDR heritage was the core objective of an initiative *Pro-Palast* that started in 1993 and continued as OKV member organization *Freundeskreis Palast der Republik*.

Shortly before unification the building was closed because of asbestos contamination. This soon led to confrontational public debates on whether the *Palast* should be renovated or simply torn down. Eventually the demolition of the *Palast* was decided upon but postponed,

[82] http://www.vvn-bda.de/ (accessed 2 November 2016).
[83] Heinrich Fink, "'No pasaran' in Dresden". In: *Ossietzky* 4 (2010).
[84] See chapter three for more information on *Heideruh*; current OKV president Matthias Werner (s. 2013) is active in this organization.
[85] http://www.ddr-kabinett-bochum.de/ (accessed 2 November 2016).
[86] http://www.thaelmann-gedenkstaette.de/ (accessed 2 November 2016).

and in 2004 and 2005 the building was occupied by artists for exhibitions and performances. This period of interim use brought new people to the *Palast*, including a group who called themselves the *Palastretter* (*Palast* saviours).[87]

Yet the OKV's *ProPalast/FPdR* organization did not cooperate with these *Palastretter*, in spite of the fact that they had a similar goal. And this goal was not utopian, since their sentiment was even shared by a large part of East Berlin's population. Asked about the reasons for this lack of cooperation, Rudolf Denner, a long-term member of the *ProPalast* initiative and the FPdR, explained that

> we were *too old* to them, and they were *too radical* to us. They organized a *Palast*-occupation. Something where you really collide with the law… Yes, that should be avoided. We accepted each other, not more.[88]

Instead of joining the new initiatives, *ProPalast* focussed on documenting the usage of the *Palast* and on restaging specific hits of the *Palast's* GDR-time cultural program in the Berlin-Karlshorst Theatre.[89] The latter activity was mainly steered by Klaus Wons (1935–2013), the former cultural program officer of the *Palast der Republik* who experienced the closure of the *Palast* as a personal catastrophe.[90] His post-*Wende* activities were to remedy his obviously heart-felt sense of loss. This explains why *Palast* activism assumed the form of a GDR cultural revival program; a form which failed to resonate with a new public beyond former (loyal) GDR citizens.[91]

Tellingly, when the demolition the *Palast* started in 2006, the young *Palastretter* disbanded, but the elderly *ProPalast* initiative continued as the FPdR. According to Denner and Wons,[92] their goal was now to keep the memory of the *Palast* alive, out of emotional attachment of the individuals who once worked in the *Palast*, and also as a protest against German historiography on the GDR, which in their eyes consciously neglects all positive

[87] www.palastretter.de (accessed 2 November 2016).
[88] Interview with Rudolf Denner, 10 December 2013; emphasis mine.
[89] Including a "*Kleine Kessel Buntes*" show to remember a famous GDR entertainment program regularly recorded in the *Palast*, documented at the 21st *Wanderausstellung* of the FPdR (2013) in Berlin: FPdR, "Die 'Kleinen Kessel Buntes'. Erinnerungspflege und Kampf um den Palasterhalt. Die Veranstaltungsreihe im Theater in Berlin-Karlshorst." Panel at the *21st Temporary Exhibition of the FPdR* (Berlin: 11 October–10 December 2013).
[90] Klaus Wons' life story is presented in chapter two.
[91] The same atmosphere of pride in the cultural achievements of the Palast der Republic and grieve over the loss of this building and its (work)environment can be found in the "autobiography" of the Palast; a rather curious book that purports to describe the building, glory days, and demise of the Palast through the eyes of the building itself. Tino Schreiber, *Der Bundesrepublikpalast* (Leipzig: Einbuch 2013).
[92] Interview with Rudolf Denner and Klaus Wons, 10 July 2012.

aspects of the GDR.[93] To this goal, the FPdR organizes temporary exhibitions on the *Palast* history and its demolition. The FPdR has obtained financial support as well as space for its temporary exhibitions about the now demolished GDR's People's Palace from *Die Linke*. Yet the FPdR's contacts with *Die Linke* are somewhat of an exception within the OKV, and they mainly rest on the personal connections and Party engagement of *Freundeskreis* speaker Rudolf Denner.[94] Moreover, the *Freundeskreis* focuses on GDR cultural heritage, an issue more capable of attracting broader support than the personal rights of former functionaries.

As this case demonstrates, cultural cooperation with "outside" groups failed too, in spite of shared goals (albeit for different reasons). As the *ProPalast* initiative focused only on their own vision of the *Palast*, and disapproved of the more confrontational activism of the younger *Palastretter*, the potential for cooperation was lost. This failure once more signals the extent to which OKV organizations are caught between rejection and splendid isolation. It suggests that their status of outcasts is both externally driven and self-enforced, by insisting on a narrative that foregrounds positive lived experiences of the GDR.

Conclusion

Since its establishment in the early 1990s the OKV has largely been unable to forge contacts outside of its own immediate sphere of East German (elite) interest organizations. The reasons for this are both practical and ideological, and mainly result from the experiences of OKV members within the GDR and their view on GDR history. In particular, the protection of a positive image of the former state and, consequently, of their own lives as loyal citizens within this state, form the core agenda of the OKV community. Many OKV members understand their respective organizations as their *politische Heimat*, and their own position in unified Germany as one of internal exile. As with migrant communities abroad, both integration in and assimilation to the "new state" prove difficult. The emotional attachment to an idealized community which they left (or rather, that left them) is the fundament of their organization.

OKV activists see themselves as part of a broader left movement, and habitually point to the need to find allies in politics and within broader society to secure the realization of

[93] Interview with Rudolf Denner and Klaus Wons, 10 July 2012; see also chapter three.
[94] Interview with Rudolf Denner, 8 November 2012.

their goals. Yet due to the OKV members' moral justification of their past, their search for partners is reduced to groups that share their "East traditional left" framework.

Going back to the traditional versus new left and West versus East cleavages discussed in the introduction of this chapter, a schematic representation of the various "possible partners" identified by the OKV would look as in Figure 6.1:

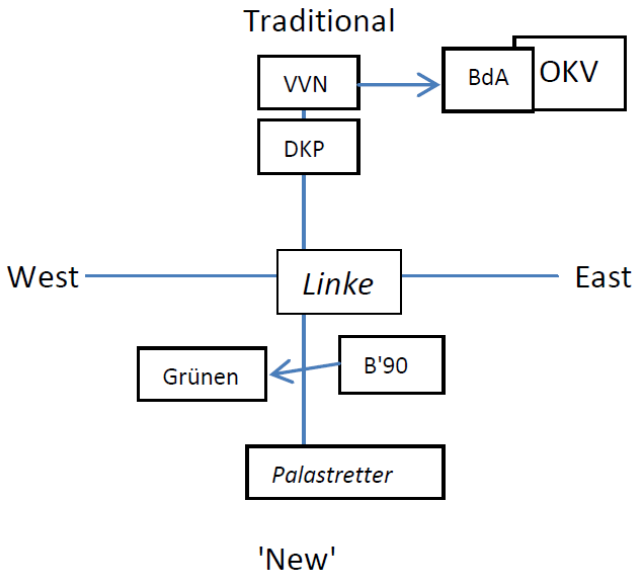

Figure 6.1: OKV's possible partners and their placement according to the traditional–new and west–east cleavages

We see that the only organizations with which the OKV managed to establish some rapport are the organizations that at least partly overlap with the "traditional East" sector, namely *Die Linke*, which is still carefully balancing its old and new constituencies, and the DKP and other, mainly antifascist, West German organizations that already before 1989 had ideological ties and contacts with GDR organizations. Organizations qualifying as "eastern", but not as "traditional", include groups of GDR dissidents that before 1989 had been arguing for an alternative socialism. As with other "new" left groups from the west, these groups formed as "a reaction against authoritarian Communism",[95] and usually focused especially on the dimension of liberal (and often national) freedoms that were lacking in the communist countries of Central Eastern Europe. In general, such movements found it easier to establish connections across the East-West divide: thus *Bündnis'90* merged with the West German

[95] Magnus Wennerhag, Christian Fröhlich and Grzegorz Piotroswki, "Introduction". In: M Wennerhag et al. (eds.), *Radical Left Movements in Europe* (Burlington: Ashgate; forthcoming, 2017).

Greens to form *B'90/Grünen*. And the few communist organizations in West Germany should be placed in the traditional field, but not distinctly on the western side of the spectrum, since they usually had (often concealed) contacts with the SED and were heavily influenced by practical and ideological developments in the GDR. The social democrat SPD, finally, tried to dissociate itself from the SED – partly because of pressure from the CDU and the Greens.

The party that has struggled most to bridge the "old East" and "new West" divide of the left is of course *Die Linke*. At great pains to distance itself from its image as a reincarnation of the former ruling party of the GDR, *Die Linke* has become Germany's main radical left party. This involved walking a tightrope between their original SED constituents (who until well into the 2000s represented the majority of party activists) and attempts to reinvent the party in order to find new constituents – both in East and in West Germany. In its attempts to appeal to a broader group of "new" leftists, and to gain public and political acceptance in the whole of Germany, *Die Linke* thus moved away from its original position as a "traditional East" party, to publicly position itself on all three other quarters of the intra-left divide, which led to an uneasy combination of both egalitarian and libertarian values.[96]

As it turned out, in the German setting, most left movements and organizations do not wish to be publicly associated with the "traditional eastern", or "post-SED" position. This poses significant problems for the OKV in its search for political partners. Erstwhile GDR functionaries who remain fixated on their former status and occupations make unattractive allies for the "liberal-libertarian" left (found on the "traditional West" and "new West and East" axes). This cleavage is only exacerbated by the OKV activists' inability to operate outside of their own framework, which is centred on a particular understanding of the GDR as having been the "better", "antifascist", and, ultimately, "just" Germany. The most important matter for OKV activists is not the practical (financial, or even juridical) result of their actions, but rather the public recognition of this particular view of the GDR. Their mission is in fact linked to political epistemics: It is the attempt to create an environment that validates their view on the GDR through the maintenance of state socialist ideological patterns of understanding. Over the past 28 years, the mission for public recognition has however proven ineffective. In line with the GDR's Manichaean worldview that they wish to adhere to, this leaves OKV activists with only one possible interpretation of their situation; namely, that of an unsuccessful struggle against the capitalist "enemy". The failure of

[96] For a more thorough discussion on these cleavages within Die Linke, see Bouma, "Ideological Confirmation and Party Consolidation".

external linkage thereby leads to the reinforcement of the internal functions of the OKV associations, which continue to focus on (ideological) identity preservation in isolation from political developments around them.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

This thesis proposed to look at the post-1990 activities of former GDR elites from a very different angle than that usually adopted in German public and academic discourse. My goal was to take their own accounts seriously; instead of looking at the former Stasi milieu as an expression of political revanchism, I attempted to identify the reasons why the activists think what they think, and why they do what they do. My entry point was an engagement with their life stories, and with their ways of remembering the GDR.

In the first part of this thesis these personal accounts were therefore put into the context of German and GDR history. The goal was not to contribute to historiography as such: GDR history has already been covered by a burgeoning corpus of new studies that became possible after the opening of the GDR archives. Rather, the goal was to explore the subjectivity of the activists, and to disclose the anchor points in history that have shaped their worldviews. This part was informed by my oral history fieldwork, in addition to the materials that OKV members published on their views and activities in the GDR and after. The focus was on individuals, but these individuals appeared as a coherent age cohort, as representatives of a specific German generation; and their activities within the various OKV groups allowed me to view them as a post-socialist collective. In this part, I argued that the OKV can be defined as a "memory group" whose primary focus lies in the creation and maintenance of a shared view of the GDR which is rooted in that state's socialist ideology. This view is reinforced by negative experiences in post-*Wende* Germany, and the activists' severe critique of the present system.

As discussed in the introduction, the historical narrative that OKV members subscribe to and propagate is the *Fortschrittsgedächtnis,* Sabrow's term for the GDR memory that is opposed to the *Diktaturgedächtnis* and the *Arrangementsgedächtnis*. However, the expressions of this *Fortschrittsgedächtnis*, and more specifically the rootedness of OKV memory culture in official GDR discourses, conceal that OKV members' memory of the GDR reflects the construction of their group identity *after* 1990, and is thus conditioned by post-GDR developments. In other words, I studied the OKV not as a successor organization of the GDR, or of the Stasi, but as a post-unification phenomenon – and as an organization that struggles with the break from the very heritage that they claim to maintain.

Today – twenty-seven years into unified Germany – the continued adherence to GDR memory might appear dazzling. I argued that the continued adherence to such worldviews has much to do with personal biographies – that is, with the attempt to "rescue" and preserve one's own experiences and achievements – but also with the longevity of GDR "political epistemics", a term coined by Andreas Glaeser to describe knowledge-making practices that are rooted in political ideology. This way of ideological interpretation made it impossible to adjust policies to changing realities, as Glaeser has demonstrated with his case study on the Stasi's failure in 1989. My argument is that ever since, this same entrenched GDR political epistemics has served as a mighty shield to protect the OKV community from disintegration, but also as a barrier that prevented them from reaching out to others who do not share their view of German history. The OKV's isolation reflects the epistemic difference in interpretations of history and political legitimacy: while most Germans remember the GDR either as an artificial Soviet satellite that violated human rights and crippled personal freedom (*Diktaturgedächtnis*), or through the way in which they *accomodated* themselves to an ultimately unfree regime (*Arrangementsgedächtnis*), the OKV's epistemology explains away the negative emanations of that state, and upholds its historical legitimacy as a timeless project.

Epistemic nostalgia

In chapter one, I discussed how far the OKV's attachment to the past can be interpreted through the concept of nostalgia. Nostalgia is more than a longing for the past: within the OKV, it is a sentiment of regret for the loss of the securities that shaped their former lives, but also a longing for the longings of the past, namely for the socialist experiment on German soil that ultimately, as most of my interlocutors would concede, remained an unfulfilled promise. Yet beyond these relatively well-known characteristics of nostalgia, there is an additional aspect to the nostalgia practiced in the OKV: it is directed not so much towards any specific event or GDR achievement but towards the former state's worldview. It is a longing for the ideological framework that shaped politics and life in the GDR. This political ideology had been an important point of orientation for OKV members until 1989, and remained so after state socialist ideology lost its predominance in wider society. This brand of nostalgia practiced in the OKV is intrinsically interwoven with the political epistemics of the GDR as described by Andreas Glaeser; and I argue that this epistemology is in fact not just the *form* in which nostalgia is expressed but also its very *object*.

What is central to OKV members' nostalgia is not the loss of their belief in the ideals of the GDR – this belief continues in activist circles – but the loss of the competence and status in society that they once derived from this ideology. In the good old days, their confidence in state socialism was reinforced by their remarkable upward mobility, so that their own experiences in the GDR were understood through the prism of state socialist ideology. With other words, the meaning-making practices of the state provided them with the security of mastering the political and social codes of society. They continue to regard their former positions in socialist society as legitimate; for them, their rather comfortable position as established functionaries in the GDR state was the natural outcome of their *political* competence.

With the *Wende*, GDR ideology obviously could no longer provide this sense of control. Instead of being rewarded for their political competence, they saw this very competence now resulting in alienation: most OKV members lost their jobs and status. This loss of self-worth is reflected in my respondents' recollection of the early 1990s: they "had no function anymore", and felt they "became a nobody". This feeling could not simply be offset by embracing the norms and practices of the FRG, for this would have been a denial of their past achievements. It is precisely this justification of personal and collective achievements that they see betrayed by the *Wendehälse*, those former GDR citizens who adopted the FRG's worldview. Instead, they remained committed to the GDR's meaning-making practices and its interpretation of the way the world functions, and the OKV became the social place where the old worldview could be kept intact.

In the new organizational setting, the personal frustration with reunification was converted into activism. Chapter four revealed that already in the early 1990s, OKV members positively engaged with the institutions of the new state by launching court procedures. They thus copied the legalistic approach that the new order applied against some of them at that time. Yet the actual goal was not monetary compensation. When their year-long judicial struggle finally resulted in a (limited) pension raise for former Stasi officers, OKV leaders saw this not as a success but rather as another denigration, for the court based its judgment on social grounds (avoiding unnecessary poverty in German society), and thereby continued to deny OKV members the vindication of their life achievements that they longed for. What OKV members are ultimately aiming at, then, is this vindication of their past, not paternalistic clemency, which they regard as just another tool of ideological repression by the victors.

At the same time, the activities of most OKV organizations reveal little consideration for contemporary German politics beyond their immediate interests. Their commitment to the GDR's particular branch of state socialism has not translated into concerted political engagement in today's socialist parties. To be sure, many OKV members remain members of *Die Linke*. However, most of them claim attachment to this SED successor party out of tradition rather than because of its contemporary agenda. The OKV's engagement with *Die Linke* is moreover usually limited to issues of the Stasi or the GDR, and to countering their public vilification. Moreover, only few found their way into smaller radical left parties such as the DKP, whose constituencies were in the West (even though the DKP was financed by the Honecker regime); these fringe parties were "too radical" in the eyes of most OKV members.

The fact that the OKV places commitment to its vision of the past above contemporary political goals makes any cooperation with outside parties difficult. As my study of the *Freundeskreis Palast der Republik* revealed, this is even the case where tangible aspects of preserving the memory of the GDR past are at stake. This once more demonstrates that the OKV's principled political understanding prevails over their practical engagement with particular issues. At the same time a cooperation with squatters was also out of the question because the OKV leaders remained fully convinced that they must abide by FRG law.

Their nostalgia is therefore not identical with ideology, but related to ideology-in-the-past: the object of their nostalgia is the time when the ideology that shaped their lives appeared to reflect the way the world functioned. The OKV's nostalgia is thus a direct product of the meaning-making practices of a state in which they were deeply integrated, and which subsequently went down together with this state. It is for this reason that only through the meaning-making practices of the GDR they can fight for a full validation of their lives. Any other solution would stop short of positively evaluating not only their efforts (work), but also their achievements (leading positions and prestige in state and society).

The OKV case therefore adds a new aspect to the various definitions of nostalgia discussed in chapter one. I argue that, in the case of the OKV, the longing for the past is not only a "longing for past longing", but a longing for a lost sense of political and social mastery. This mastery was born out of the conviction to understand the world, and the experiences of personal successes that validated this conviction. The discreditation of their GDR-based understanding of the world is therefore experienced as a devaluation of their

entire lives. Accordingly, what OKV members long for is the time in which their way of making sense of the world had to be accepted by society as a whole. It is thus closely related to Andreas Glaeser's concept of political epistemics, and it is for this reason that I propose to conceptualize this nostalgia as "epistemic nostalgia".

Nostalgia narratives

The selected autobiographical accounts analysed in chapter two demonstrated how socialist ideology of the GDR variety continues to inform the OKV's political understandings and activities. In their individual narratives, my informants used the same framework for understanding the Nazi past, the GDR era (socialist progress), and the present (social injustice and militarism under capitalism). In spite of the heterogeneity of my study group and the many ways through which individuals came together to form the OKV, the life stories clearly followed a common design. Similarities in their accounts can partly be explained by their training in socialist autobiographical writing and because most OKV members are part of the same generation that was socialized within similar patterns of thought and understanding. But the uniformity of OKV members' life accounts is also a result of the re-enacting of GDR narratives and customs in the OKV memory group. My interviewees designed their accounts, consciously or unconsciously, according to what they believed conforms to OKV goals. This has been their practice since the early 1990s, and I myself, as an outside observer, offered another trigger to reproduce these accounts. My goal was not to question the veracity of these accounts, but to understand how they were shaped; and on a few occasions we could observe tensions between their "streamlined" accounts and personal negative experiences with the GDR that even my respondents could not suppress completely.

As we have seen, the typified OKV narratives can indeed be called "nostalgic", in the sense of longing for a bygone past when certain ideological patterns governed; and it is these patterns of political thinking that frame the activists' nostalgic emotions. This does not mean that these stories do not have a very specific political purpose in the present. In several cases of former Stasi officers and of NVA soldiers who served at the border between the two German states, this political legitimation also undergirds the justification of personal actions which are now commonly condemned as having been wrong and illegal – hence their demands for legal acquittal and for pension reparations. However, the positive image of the GDR is central also to those OKV activists who had nothing to do with GDR security organs,

and who have nothing directly to gain from such legal action. I argue that their adherence to a positive political interpretation of the GDR provides all of them with a framework for making sense of the ruptures in their lives since 1989. Within this group, these ruptures are interpreted as the product of a deep-seated and continuing West German anti-communism.[1]

It should be clear by now that the OKV is much more than a lobby group for Stasi interests: it must above all be seen as an identity organization that offers its various members stability and orientation by upholding a shared worldview through the maintenance of a collective memory and through shared commemoration rituals of the past. The OKV is thus an epistemic community based on shared memories and identity. This is reflected in the statement of several of its members that the organization provides them with a new "homeland" (*Heimat*) after the loss of the GDR. To them, the OKV is a GDR substitute, and a home base for defying what came after; but there are no indications that it ever served as a political springboard for establishing a new GDR, for undoing the "counter-revolution" of 1989. In fact, OKV members realize that the very political epistemics that they adhere to are a minority view, and while they are struggling with their pariah status in the new German society, they make no real efforts to overcome their marginalization. In fact, they feel comfortable in this political-nostalgic niche.

This does not mean that nostalgia is "unpolitical", and merely directed to the past. In the first two chapters, I argued that nostalgia and present-day activities go hand in hand. My point was that memory (nostalgic or otherwise) is in fact also about the present: the way in which the past is remembered not only provides legitimacy for the personal past, it also influences orientation and action in the present. The memory of the past reinforces the ideological epistemics of that past, so that these epistemics govern action in the present.

Strategies of continuity

Parts II and III of this dissertation therefore followed the various forms in which OKV members attempt to (re)validate the GDR-shaped political outlooks to which they remain committed. Part II (chapter three) zoomed in on the organizational life of the OKV, that is, the establishment and maintenance of the OKV system, whereas Part III (chapters four and

[1] This was a general trope that returned in the stories of most informants, especially in relation to the marginalization and prosecution of specific groups of former GDR cadres, and in relation to historiography on the GDR. This includes e.g. the stories of Dieter Stiebert and Hans Bauer (interview 14 June 2012); Dieter Feuerstein (interview 11 July 2012); Siegfried Mechler (interview 12 July 2012); Hans Modrow (interview 26 November 2013); and Matthias Werner (interview 8 May 2015).

five) addressed the external activities of several OKV organizations. Although external activities are often related to specific material goals (such as pension raises in the case of the ISOR, or the maintenance of specific heritage sites), the underlying motives are again related to the vindication of the GDR past. Together, these chapters show the scope and intensity of OKV efforts to keep its GDR-inspired political epistemics intact in the vastly changed context of unified Germany. In order to achieve such epistemic continuity, the OKV uses three strategies in particular, which fall into the categories of "organization", "self-isolation" and "(re)framing".

Organization

The first strategy of OKV members is the organization of like-minded people in a network of interlinked associations. Together, these associations form the institutional backbone of the OKV milieu: in the first place they provide the space where OKV members meet and discuss. Within the OKV, narratives on the past are shared, recreated, and expanded upon. The OKV provides a place for clinging on to GDR values, visualized by an ostensible adherence to MfS and NVA ranks and titles. While these titles have become meaningless or subject to disapproval outside the OKV milieu, they are respectfully upheld within the organization itself. With this symbolic (if not outright nostalgic) reverence to past ranks, OKV members seek to uphold the GDR system of validation. Scripted events and rituals (especially on GDR memory days) are a performative affirmation of former GDR cadres' belief in socialism. The same can be said for the continued respect for East German symbols of prestige, such as state medals awarded in GDR times, which are still valued among OKV veterans of the NVA and the Stasi.

The organizational aspect was discussed in chapter three, which provided an overview of the various OKV member organizations and their development since the 1990s. Here I attempted to relate present-day activities to GDR practices, on the level of organizational continuity (some groups obviously filled the void left by the disappearance of official GDR organs) and on the level of ideological consistency before and after 1989. The individual organizations clearly reflect the biographical profiles of their major activists as discussed in chapter two.

The goal of chapter three was to cover the whole breadth of the OKV (and of GBM as its major mother organization below the organizational level of OKV). My argument was that the smaller associations in particular perform crucial roles to OKV as a whole: their focus on

historical memory, in the form of preserving GDR *lieux de mémoire* or in the form of maintaining the heritage of particular GDR state organs, makes the OKV more than just a lobbying machine for the financial interests of former Stasi officers. Here, in the preservation of GDR ideology and self-image, we find the most powerful argument that the OKV can marshal against German mainstream discourse. The relatively large number of 26 organizations affiliated to the OKV moreover lends the association a semblance of multitude. This image is consciously promoted by the OKV, and is used in discussions with potential partners (such as in their attempts to influence *Die Linke*, as analysed in chapter five) and to influence opponents (which is the goal of their campaigns of petition-writing to various politicians, as discussed in chapter four). I argue, however, that this semblance of plurality is primarily upheld for consumption by OKV members themselves: it inflates the rather marginal group of OKV members to a seemingly broad and pluriform community of like-minded but independent associations, thus suggesting a broad level of support for its views that is in fact not in evidence. The various OKV organizations thus provide audiences to each other, and thereby substitute their painful lack of outside support. This is most visible in the many letters of support that organizations write for each other, and that they publish in their online and print materials, and also in the GBM's annual human rights prize, which has several times been awarded to activists of other OKV-associated organizations. As the effectiveness of symbols and rituals relies heavily on the degree to which they are accepted, OKV member organizations indeed *need* each other in order to sustain an environment that does not only validate socialism as an ideology, but the specific East German state order in particular. OKV's member associations – which are autonomous and independent on paper while often consisting of overlapping work groups with shared leaderships and memberships – validate each other's narratives and understandings of political developments in Germany, and produce for their members the semblance of a larger environment in which the rules of the GDR still apply. This explains why such largely overlapping organizations do not merge, and why new work groups continue to emerge.

Self-isolation

OKV members have thus shown remarkable efforts in creating a common environment supportive of their GDR-based understanding of the world. Yet the social and political reality of contemporary Germany clearly poses a big challenge to the OKV's worldview. As the OKV's views are not accepted by the vast majority of the German population, OKV largely avoids particularly "countervalidating settings", and invests most time and energy in the

maintenance of their internal "OKV milieu". The strategy of "organization" is therefore inherently linked to the strategy of "self-isolation": the conscious decision not to have ties with organizations that do not share the OKV's views. Although isolation is obviously also the result of the rejection of the OKV by the outside world, the OKV's difficult relations with *Die Linke* and other radical left organizations reveal how the OKV also chooses to isolate itself.

This is particularly visible in the OKV's relations with Germany's major radical left party, the SED/PDS/*Linkspartei*/*Die Linke*. In its various incarnations, this party has remained the major political contact of the OKV leaders. While the party broke with the Stasi to become an all-German left, some groups within *Die Linke* still support OKV goals. The bridge here is Hans Modrow. His position is paradoxical: Modrow was the SED politician who liberated the party from its Stasi heritage, but he then remained the person closest to OKV circles, and most receptive to OKV aspirations. Other attempts at linkage (on the issue of monuments, but also of ideology) failed due to the fact that OKV groups remained committed to the very specific GDR view of history. Because OKV members ultimately aim at creating among themselves an atmosphere supportive of their GDR-inspired political epistemics, they cannot afford to cooperate with groups that question and challenge their specific understandings of past and present. The consequence is that any cooperation with outside groups is extremely difficult.

The strategies of organization and self-isolation thus work hand in hand to maintain the worldview of the OKV: Within the OKV, its members are confined to an environment of like-minded people. This is an outcome of their political epistemology, perhaps not very different from how Glaeser described the operational limitations of the self-confined Stasi offices where information moved in circles. In addition, self-isolation insulates OKV members from outside critique, again facilitating ideological rigidity. Thus only few OKV affiliates are engaged in broader alliances. These cases seemingly provide the OKV with grassroots legitimacy at the local level; yet on second glance, the partners in these local alliances in fact come from the same GDR-establishment background as the OKV does. Such alliances thus again primarily facilitate the *image* of broad alliances, while they have little influence on the ideological outlook of the OKV. However, there are obviously clear limits to these strategies: whatever their misgivings about contemporary Germany, OKV members happen to live in the FRG, and encounter its dominant narratives on the past and present on a daily basis.

(Re)framing

This brings us to the third major strategy that shapes the OKV, which can be described as "(re)framing": using a specific frame of interpretation that allows them to understand a new situation in concordance with their worldview. Obviously, the frame of the OKV is not exactly new, but rather a continuation of the GDR frame that was given up by others. Here we come back to the discussion of revisionism – a term that OKV members strongly disagree with from their position of ideological continuity. From their perspective, the OKV is not engaged in "revisionism", but simply maintaining the framework of interpretation that was authoritative in the GDR against the now dominant frames of interpretation.

It is clear that there are many contacts with people who do not share the OKV's views on history and politics. OKV members meet their perceived ideological opponents in the courtroom (for instance when GRH members were called to court, or when ISOR issues legal complaints to the Constitutional Court), and do not refrain from acting in a world that does not follow their ideological logic. In this case, however, the situation is "re-framed" to fit the ideological understandings of the OKV. Court cases, pension reductions, and the removal of GDR-era monuments such as the *Palast der Republik,* are not interpreted as resulting from the GDR's bankruptcy as a state, but instead as the outcome of just a "lost battle" in an ever-continuing struggle between socialism and capitalism. In this way, the *Wende* does not have to be accepted as a failure of state socialist ideology, but is seen as the tragic outcome of the loss of the Cold War.

The continued belief in East German socialist myths and ideology releases former GDR cadres from a more thorough self-investigation and enables OKV members to understand themselves as "victims" of unification. Because this "victimhood" is framed as stemming from an ideological battle, OKV members claim for themselves the status of communist fighters, of subjects of state repression for their convictions (as *Verfolgte*, persecuted), not passive victims (*Opfer*) of changed circumstances. This allows them to reintegrate their broken life stories into a broader and ongoing narrative of socialist struggle against capitalist hegemony. Such self-fashioning can be linked back to epic events in the struggle for socialism, including most poignantly the heroic lives of Old Communists who had been active in the resistance against the Nazis, and who were celebrated in the GDR as the state's founding fathers.[2] It is no wonder then that several OKV organizations are devoted

[2] The celebration of communist heroes and martyrs was a common practice in socialist states. These included both shared commemorations and commemorations of events that were more country-specific. A good account

to preserving the memory of the GDR's most prominent martyrs. By constituting a network of associations which, in a concerted effort, promote the image of an ongoing struggle between GDR socialism and FRG capitalism, the OKV provides the place where its members transform their own status from losers to martyrs. In this way, clinging on to the former state's ideology provides OKV members with a sense of meaning in life that is essential to their self-image.

The political environment

Particularly the OKV organizations that pursue legal interests claim that the FRG conducted "*Siegerjustiz*" when it took over the GDR. Yet this argument is rather unconvincing if we look at the way in which former GDR officials have actually been treated after 1990. Despite a number of court cases over GDR violence at the border, and despite the truncation of former regime stalwarts' pensions, transitional justice in the FRG has been relatively lenient, and has been criticized by former dissidents for not fully satisfying their wish to see justice done. Individual OKV activists' attempts to not credit the system, but instead the personality of specific "really independent judges" for the lenient sentences they encountered are likewise problematic, given the fact that the same independency of the judicial system did not exist in the GDR. After all, OKV has not formulated any claim that the state is hindering them in the dissemination of their view of justice.

Paradoxically, the relative leniency of transitional justice has further contributed to the marginalization of former GDR functionaries. The formal attitude towards former Stasi members has removed the issue from the political agenda relatively soon after German reunification. There were heated debates about the Stasi in the early 1990s, and especially *Die Linke* still struggles from time to time with its attitude towards party representatives who cooperated with the Stasi in the past. But no party in Germany cultivates a fear of a return to state socialism, or of former elites taking over political or economic power. This stands in contrast to the political situation in Poland or Hungary, where current power-holders use resentment against the former communist elites in order to strengthen their own position, and where the political climate still fosters calls for repressive measures against people associated

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of the ideological function that the commemoration of the Paris Commune had in several socialist regimes can be found in Dennis Bos, *Bloed en barricaden. De Parijse Commune herdacht* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Wereldbibliotheek 2014).

with the former regimes.[3] Germany however has from the start and consistently put the defense of its constitutional order above calls for retribution. In turn, this has frustrated some former GDR dissidents. Bärbel Bohley articulated this frustration when she famously said that "we wanted justice but we got the rule of law" ("Wir wollten Gerechtigkeit und bekamen den Rechtsstaat"**).**

At the same time, the clemency experienced by individual former Stasi members in court, as well as ISOR's relative successes in its fight for pension restitution, have made it harder for the OKV to persist in the self-image of "soldiers" against a fierce and evil enemy. Germany's relatively relaxed attitude towards the GDR heritage unwittingly hindered the OKV in their discursive strategy of self-preservation. It is obvious even to them that they can complain openly about their situation because they are given the space to do so – something which was out of the question for dissident thinkers in the GDR. To put it bluntly, the state against which they operate denies them prison and prosecution, and instead qualifies them as harmless. This has contributed to the OKV's place in the German political system: as an unliked but ultimately inconsequential organization that is tolerated in the name of Germany's constitutional order.

[3] Reviewing the similarities between Polish and Hungarian political developments, Jan-Werner Müller concludes that "Poland and Hungary now offer a toxic ideological brew that is reminiscent of interwar Europe: anti-communism and anti-capitalism can be combined and justified in the name of a highly intolerant nationalism based on Christian values that conclusively define who is a true Hungarian or true Pole." Conceding both countries' political leaders' credentials as dissidents, Müller also observes that "the more state socialism receded in time, the more intense the anti-Communist crusades of leaders like Orbán and Kaczyński became." Jan-Werner Müller, "The Problem with Poland". In: *The New York Review of Books* (11 February 2016). Accessed online 18 December 2016: http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2016/02/11/kaczynski-eu-problem-with-poland/**.** The Polish government recently re-launched an earlier plan to cut the pensions of former agents of the communist security services of the country. This plan obviously resembles Germany's decision to truncate Stasi pensions. In Germany the decision was taken in 1990 as a measure of transitional justice in the context of comprehensive pension reforms necessitated by German unification. In Poland, the planned measure is defended as an issue of justice against the victims of communism, and comes 27 years after the fall of communism (and is brought into connection with the need to find money for a new program of child benefits, and with a general lowering of the pension age). Simultaneously, around 500 police officers are to be fired from leading positions because they already served under the communist regime. Jarosław Kaczyński, leader of Poland's ruling party "Law and Justice" (PiS), sees these measures as a way to correct the injustices of the communist regime which have not been properly avenged. Jenne Jan Holtland, "Polen gaat tienduizenden oud-communisten korten op hun pensioen". In: *De Volkskrant* (2 December 2016). Last accessed 18 December 2016: http://www.volkskrant.nl/buitenland/polen-gaat-tienduizenden-oud-communisten-korten-op-hun-pensioen ~a4426586/. András Bozóki, former Fidesz member and Hungarian minister of culture in 2005-6, has argued that Orbán's measures to centralize political powers within Fidesz and reduce the political independence of institutions is bolstere d by anti-communist ideology, "which today is no more than a cover for power ambitions". Bozóki, "The Crisis of Democracy in Hungary". In: Heinrich Böll Stiftung, *Dossier: Focus on Hungary* (21 May 2012). Last accessed 18 December 2016: https://www.boell.de/de/node/276334.

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